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ENGLISH LITERATURE

AN ILLUSTRATED RECORD

BY

RICHARD GARNETT, C.B., LL.D.

AND

EDMUND GOSSE, M.A., LL.D.

VOL. I

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Of gentilesse, than ye han herd bifore
Compreuended in this litel tretys here
To enforce with thefful of my wittes
And though that the olde wordes
as ye han herd, yet to yow alle I preye
Blamyth me nat, for as in myn entent
I shal ye nothyng fynden difference
fro the sentence of this tretys lyte
after the which this myrie tale
And therfore, forbeith, ther it
I shal
And lat me telle, al my tale I preye
Explicit
Here biginneth Chaucers
yong man called
ye
on his wyf that
which that
he for his desport is
his wyf and eek his doghter hath he
the dores faste yshette thre of
and setten saddles to the halles of
been cutted and betten his wyf
fyue mortal wounden in fyue wordes
hir feet, in hir handes, in hir eyen
and lefte hir for dede and seiden
tongues was in his hous and ran
was man pleyinge his clothes ga
te his wyf as feyforth as she dorste
for to chyrte but nat for thy he gan
the more
this noble wyf
sentence of
in his book that

Equestrian Portrait of Chaucer.

[*Ellesmere Chaucer, Bridgewater House.*]

ENGLISH LITERATURE

AN ILLUSTRATED RECORD

IN FOUR VOLUMES

VOLUME I

FROM THE BEGINNINGS TO THE AGE OF HENRY VIII

BY

RICHARD GARNETT, C.B., LL.D.

SEAL OF HENRY VIII

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PUBLISHER'S INTRODUCTION

The design of the publisher of this work has been to produce a book which shall stimulate and gratify curiosity concerning the leading authors of our country and the evolution of its literary history. This curiosity is not to be confined within the limits of an acquaintance with a few dry manuals. It appeals to the eye as well as to the ear, and as the reader becomes attracted to the writings of this or that writer, and feels his enthusiasm enkindled, he desires to know, and to know instantly and without disturbance, not only who the writer was and what he wrote, but what he looked like; perhaps at various ages; where he lived, what his handwriting was, and how he appeared in caricature to his contemporaries.

No book has hitherto been presented to the public which has fulfilled these various requirements, since it has only recently become possible to review the English literature of fifteen successive centuries, and give a carefully-related history of it all, illustrated by the necessary documents. The research of the last generation of scholars, however, has at length put the outlines within our reach, and has even enabled us to fill up the design with form and colour. If there is now a danger for the general reader, it is that too much may be offered him by specialists who can only measure his requirements by their own limitless zeal. A popular history which supplies too much is hardly more useful than one which supplies too little. The present volumes are called by their authors a "record"; they profess to be no more, but in producing such a rapid survey or outline of our literary history the greatest pains have been taken to make it harmonious in design and to see that the parts are carefully arranged according to their relative importance.

To the running commentary which pervades the volumes (and which may, if the reader wishes, be read alone as a critical narrative) have been added brief biographies of writers selected with the utmost care from the vast army of those who have exercised the profession of letters in Great Britain for so many centuries. It has been far easier to include the obvious names than to exclude those which did not seem quite fitted for a place in this rapid "record." The authors have carefully weighed the value of every reputation which could

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seem to have a claim upon them, and it is the fault of their plan if they have been obliged to omit some curious or graceful writers, who are far from being without merit, but whose history cannot be said to advance the general narrative. For these omissions they willingly take the responsibility. But they believe that every man or woman of past time, whose work actually illustrated the movement of style and thought in England, will be found to have a niche in these volumes.

The illustrations form a feature of the book which is of supreme importance, but which must be left in the main to recommend itself. It will be admitted that no previous attempt to teach the history of English literature by means of the eye has approached the present enterprise in fulness and variety. The constantly increasing facilities of reproduction, the collection and arrangement of the national treasures, the opportunity to compare and select out of this wealth the elements which appeal to the popular taste, the means by which an artistic counterpart of a rare object can be produced,—all these have never before been contrived as they can be at the present moment. The publisher claims only to have availed himself of these as fully as opportunity has permitted.

April 1903.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST VOLUME

In this initial volume of a History of English Literature it has been sought to depict for readers of general culture rather than of special attainment the development of this literature through centuries of vicissitude, from the primitive period when it is almost synonymous with poetry to the period when, in every department, it begins to challenge a place among the great literatures of the world. The writer upon whom such a task devolves encounters the obstacles, on a first view mutually exclusive, of impenetrable obscurity and unmanageable light. Many passages in the record have perished, and the gaps thus created are ill supplied by speculation and conjecture. But, on the other hand, since the investigation of early English literature has employed the scholars of America, Germany, and France hardly less than those of Britain, it has become difficult to keep pace with the progress of actual discovery, or to survey the operations of so great a host of labourers in a field so extensive, much of whose service takes the form of contribution to periodical literature. The writer has done his utmost towards this end, and has received invaluable assistance, yet he feels that his work would have better corresponded to his wish if various important accessions to the knowledge of his subject had not fallen under his observation too late to be turned to account.

One reflection has strongly impressed itself upon the writer's mind during the prosecution of his labours: that the study of the literary history of a nation will generally be profitable in proportion to the student's acquaintance with the history of the nation itself, including that of its institutions, political and social. In the case of a history of early literature treating, as in this instance, of a period anterior to the attainment of a fixed standard of language, some degree of philological information also is essential, comprising such subjects as dialectical variations, pronunciation, and prosody. To have enlarged upon this department of study would have defeated the design of this

work as a popular history. It has therefore been intentionally kept in the background, and the reader is recommended to seek his information elsewhere. In this he will be assisted by a bibliography to be appended to a subsequent volume. History, including parallels with the literary movements of other nations, stands in a different category. A due infusion of the historical element adds warmth and colour to narrative, and is therefore accordant with the ideal of a popular history. Such an infusion has been attempted here as far as considerations of space and proportion have permi ted. Regard for the interests of the reader of the present day has also enforced an extensive modernisation of obsolete spelling. Objectors should remember that it is impossible to say what precise orthography an ancient author would have employed, and that in the majority of instances he would himself have followed no uniform rule.

It remains to offer the writer's special acknowledgments to Mr. Alfred W. Pollard, of the British Museum, for friendly and zealous aid, not merely in those branches of the subject in which he is a recognised authority, but throughout the entire course of the work; as also to Mr. A. H. Bullen and Mrs. Sydney Pawling for valuable assistance in the pictorial illustration which forms so important a feature of the undertaking.

RICHARD GARNETT.

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CHAPTER I

THE BEGINNINGS

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LITERATURE is the daughter of Language. For the study, therefore, of a literature it is essential to possess a clear view of any features of the idiom in which it is conveyed which may contribute to impress it with a peculiar character.

Duality of English Speech

The most exceptional characteristic of the English language as spoken and written for centuries past is the dual constitution of its vocabulary, in which it differs from all the other leading languages of Europe, and can only be paralleled with those tongues of Eastern and Western Asia which have respectively become pervaded with Chinese or Arabic influence. All European languages, indeed, have borrowed largely, and Spanish might almost seem a compound of three or four distinct tongues spoken by widely differing races. Yet even here Latin is distinctly the paramount speech, and the others are but its satellites. In English alone two constituents, one indigenous, the other engrafted, practically balance each other. Both are essential to the language; one as forming the original nucleus of personality without which English would be a mere dialect of some foreign idiom; the other as possessing that sure criterion of vitality, the capacity of growth and modification. This our original Anglo-Saxon speech has lost, and recent endeavours to restore it have only served to prove the loss perpetual. The indigenous portion, therefore, of our vocabulary is the more nationally characteristic, the engrafted is the more flexible and copious. The stability of one element is admirably balanced by the plasticity of the other. Their union in one speech, frequently permitting choice between two words equally appropriate, has largely contributed to render the English vocabulary opulent and to impart colour and music to English style.

Native and foreign ingredients in English

The circumstance on which we have thus briefly dwelt may be considered as the key to the history of English literature, which appears as a constant struggle between innate and exotic constituents. As regards the mere vocabulary of the language this struggle did not commence until the Norman Conquest, but as concerns the spirit of the literature it had begun much sooner. The epic of *Beowulf* shows the direction which

Anglo-Saxon literature might have taken without Latin interference; almost all its other monuments show what, under that interference, it actually became. The distinction is not in the outer vesture of words, but in the inner spirit. With the Norman Conquest it comes to prevail in both, and the history of both language and literature ever since may be described as that of the gradual approximation and interfusion of constituents seemingly irreconcilable, and the occasional attempts, fortunately unsuccessful, of one of these to expel the other. It may almost be said that the same duality repeats itself in every English institution, civil and ecclesiastical, so closely does the national speech represent the national mind.

Celtic influences

The mere fact of a spirit of compromise pervading our language, literature, and institutions, suffices to show that Celtic influence cannot be very potent in any of them. Attempts have been made to prove the English people substantially Celtic; but if this had been the case their language would have been Celtic also. When an uncivilised nation subdues a civilised one it must either exterminate the vanquished, or assimilate much of their language and institutions. *Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit.* The Normans afford a case in point; they did not expel or destroy the conquered French, and are consequently found within a generation or two ignorant of their ancestral language and fluent in that of their subjects. Their laws, their manners, their religion, all are changed. Nothing of the kind happens in England. The borrowings from the old British language are indeed extensive, but they nearly all consist of common words, descriptive of ordinary things, and unconnected with any intellectual process. Nothing can more decisively establish the subordinate condition and limited proportion of the British element in the community. The population is further shown to have been, when not pure Saxon, a mingled breed, children of Saxon fathers and British mothers, by the complete dying out of Christianity. Had the original inhabitants remained a recognisable Celtic element of the population, in however ignominious a condition of vassalage, vestiges at least, probably much more, of their religion must have survived among them. We therefore feel absolved from any consideration of Celtic elements as appreciable factors in the early literature of England. Celtic monks, indeed, as will be seen, contributed to the civilisation of Northumbria, and thus indirectly contributed to the growth of a Christian literature in that kingdom, but they infused no recognisable Celtic spirit into it. England (a term used here for convenience sake, but, when not obviously restricted to South Britain, always to be understood as denoting the British Empire) does indeed owe an unspeakable debt to the illustrious Celts who have written in English for the "natural magic" and other specifically Celtic gifts which they have infused into her literature; while the blending of Celtic with Saxon blood, a comparatively modern phenomenon except in the western districts, has been fortunate for both races. But these circumstances do not affect the substantially Teutonic

and Scandinavian character of the English race and language, or alter the fact that all important modifications of English literature have come not from Celtic but from Latin sources. England and Scotland, with the exception of the Highlands and possibly of Cornwall, remain as essentially Teutonic in blood and speech as Wales continues Welsh. The "Anglo-Celtic race," if such there be, must be sought not in Great Britain, but among the extremely mixed population of Ireland.

Latin language in Britain

The entire dissimilarity of speech, indeed, must have rendered it impossible for Celts to have bestowed a literature upon the Anglo-Saxons, except through the medium of Latin. Such a literature would have been hardly distinguishable from that actually created by the contact of Saxon converts with Roman clergy; it would have been mainly biblical and ecclesiastical, and devoid of specially Celtic characteristics. Celtic missionaries certainly might have sown the seeds of civilisation during the century and a half which elapsed between Hengist and Augustine, but the inveterate hatred of race appears to have effectually restrained them. Not from the successors of St. Columba or St. Patrick did light come to Saxondom, but from the successors of St. Peter.

Celtic and Anglo-Saxon

It might have seemed more likely that learning would spring up from the vestiges of Imperial Rome, with which, in their material aspect, Britain continued to be thickly strewn. Many towns which survived into Saxon times had originally been Roman; Roman roads still connected them; Roman fortresses and villas, even if dilapidated, still remained to bear witness to the higher civilisation of the Latin colonist. All these seem to have gone for nothing with the Saxon: in a fine poem of the seventh century, indeed, the minstrel muses among Roman ruins and deplores the magnificence of the past, but without an idea that any link save that of human feeling connects him with it. It must be thought that even before the Saxon's advent, whatever visible traces of Roman dominion might remain, Roman influence was verging towards extinction in Britain. The condition of the remains of several Roman cities at this day attests their destruction by a barbarous people, not Saxon, but probably Pictish or Cymric. It may well be conceived that the Roman residents who escaped would seek security on the Continent,[1] and that their speech would depart with them. Two languages must have existed side by side in Romanised Britain—Latin as the language of refined society, British as the speech of the common people. The former would naturally die out in the absence of any sufficient motive for keeping it up. The transition is certainly most striking. Up to the time of the Roman withdrawal a British gentleman wishing to go beyond the ordinary purposes of life would undoubtedly have expressed himself in Latin. His children, or at all events his grandchildren, would have been unable to express elevated sentiment in any language: unless, indeed,

Romans and Anglo-Saxons

[1] Ornaments found in the soil of caverns in Yorkshire show that these also formed a refuge for Romans or Romanised Britons.

British was reduced into literary form more perfectly than it can well be thought to have been. How different it might have been if Carausius, near the end of the third century, had succeeded in his bold design of establishing an independent British kingdom! How interesting the speculation whether, if Roman and Celt had been left to work out their destiny without Saxon interference, Britons would at this day be speaking a Romance or a Celtic language! A momentous question had it arisen, for, if united by affinity of speech to the Latin nations of the Continent, we should have been far more obnoxious to foreign influences than has been the case; if, on the other hand, our speech had been Celtic, we should have been cut off from the majority of mankind.

Christianity and Anglo-Saxon literature

The man who gave the first decided impulse to the transformation of Anglo-Saxon literature was Pope Gregory the Great, and the day from which it dates is that on which the beauty of the captive Saxon youths extorted from him the world-famous exclamation, *Non Angli sed angeli.* Evidence, nevertheless, is not wanting that Gregory was but, in French phrase, driving in a door already ajar. A century and a half had now elapsed since the first Saxon settlement in Britain (449); and half a century since the death of King Arthur about 544, a date which, even if imaginary as regards the particular event coupled with it by tradition, may be fairly taken to denote that of the final victory of the Saxon over the Celt in South Britain. A generation of comparative tranquillity must have contributed to dim the old ideals; and that these were really obsolescent is shown by the extremely rapid progress of the new religion, and the slight opposition it received from any quarter. Though priests existed among the Saxons, there can have been no endowed hierarchy deeply interested in the maintenance of the ancient order of things; and the success of the missionaries (A.D. 597) was probably promoted by their dissociation from the ancient Celtic church still extant in the unsubdued west and north of Britain, which the Saxons abhorred as inimical and the Roman missionaries as schismatical. While the sole visible token of Christianity among the Saxons prior to the mission of Augustine is the private chapel of Queen Bertha, it is still probable that King Ethelbert and his spouse were far from a solitary instance of the union of heathen husbands with Christian women from beyond sea. In any case, Christianity never made an easier conquest, and the ideals of a converted people never underwent a more complete metamorphosis. It was indeed a displacement of the original centre of gravity when saints and martyrs eclipsed warriors in the popular veneration, and the traditions of Teutons gave way to the traditions of Hebrews, Greeks, and Latins. The natural development of Anglo-Saxon literature was destroyed, and every prognostic concerning it which might have seemed reasonable a century earlier was brought to nought.

Influence of Latin learning

Contemporaneously with this revolution appeared another development of which the Anglo-Saxons could have had no idea, the introduction of

Pope Gregory the Great sends Missionaries to England

From Anglo-Saxon MS. (tenth century) in the British Museum

learning. For the first time a classical and hieratic language was brought to their knowledge, a tongue no longer the living speech of any people, but acquaintance with which, and in some measure with its literary monuments, was henceforth to distinguish the man of culture from the mere warrior and the boor. For the first time an erudite caste was established among them, men of the book, deeply demarcated from the rest of the community by costume and rule of life. The monastery was to bring the school in its train, and, ere long, prose literature was to arise among a people who had hitherto known no literature but the poetical. King Ethelbert's instinct had not wholly misled him when he shunned to meet the first missionaries from dread of their incantations, though the spirits they were actually to raise came in another shape than any he could have foreseen. At the time of Augustine's mission the Saxons appear to have had no other written character than runes, understood by so few that they were regarded as magical, and proscribed as such by the missionaries.

Pre-Christian remains of Anglo-Saxon

Before considering the influence of the new creed upon the Anglo-Saxon mind as manifested in its literature, it will be expedient to dispose of the few literary relics of the pre-Christian age. The position of by far the most important of these is anomalous. The epic of *Beowulf*, one of the few commanding peaks of Anglo-Saxon literature, is and is not pre-Christian. Modern criticism, at least, seems almost to have established that it was composed more than a century after the mission of Augustine, and traces of Christianity—perhaps interpolated—are not absent from it. On the other hand, its spirit is that of the old heroic age, it l odies forth unchristened chivalry in its intensest form, it is a near neighbour of the Eddas, and consequently very remote from Bede, Caedmon, and other lights of Christianised Anglo-Saxondom. If the poet really wrote so late as now generally believed, he dwelt spiritually in a romantic past, and cherished ideals extinct among the Saxons, though still flourishing in Scandinavia. His poem, therefore, should be treated rather with reference to its spirit than to the actual date of its composition, even were this absolutely certain. Before examining it, it will be convenient to deal with the inconsiderable fragments of early Anglo-Saxon literature which are probably pre-Christian in every point of view.

Remains of Pre-Christian literature

As in Latin, the earliest written remains of Anglo-Saxon are not literary. They consist mainly of charms, resembling, but surpassing in dignity, the ancient Roman incantations preserved in Cato the Censor's work on agriculture. Being earlier than the knowledge of writing, and transmitted orally from generation to generation, they have come down to us in a mutilated and adulterated form, having been largely interpolated by monastic transcribers in order to eradicate the traces of their original heathenism, which are nevertheless obvious. The earliest, as it would seem to be, is probably the oldest specimen of English extant :—

Hal wes thu, folde, fira modor ;
Beo thu growende on Godes faethma ;
Fodre gefylled firum to mytte.

Hail to thee, Earth, mother of men ;
Be thou fruitful in God's embrace ;
Filled with fruit for the good of men.

This and similar invocations must date from a very early period, and were doubtless chanted in Angleland before the emigration to Britain. Poetry unquestionably existed among the Saxons and Angles and kindred German tribes before they came into contact with the Romans, and was an entirely indigenous product, owing nothing to Latin or Celtic influence. It usually took the form of the praise of heroes. Tacitus tells us how in his time the German bards sang the exploits achieved by Arminius a century earlier. It would be most interesting to know whether these songs were contemporary with Arminius, and orally transmitted to a later generation, or whether successions of bards took the subject up anew from age to age. Julian, in the fourth century, found the Alemanni singing heroic lays, which it is to be wished that he had transmitted to us. Priscus, the Byzantine ambassador to the court of Attila, tells us that Attila's deeds were chanted in his presence by his minstrels, whose strains must of course have been contemporary with the events celebrated. But these Ugrian or Mongolian warblings must have been as unintelligible to the Germans as to the Romans, and the insignificant place of the mighty Attila (Etzel) in the *Nibelungen Lied* affords a striking illustration of Horace's *Vixere fortes ante Agamemnona*. Attila is nevertheless mentioned in what is most probably the earliest English poem we possess.

Widsith

The history of this poem is, notwithstanding, involved in many difficulties. It claims to be the composition of **Widsith**, an assumed name denoting "the far-traveller," and to commemorate the various courts visited by him as an itinerant minstrel. Chief among these is that of Hermanric, King of the Ostrogoths about 375. If Widsith is a real person, and the poem a genuine record of his bygone days, it must have been composed early in the fifth century. He speaks, however, distinctly of his comradeship with the Goths when they were contending "against the bands of Aetla" (Attila). Attila did not become king until 433, so, even allowing that he may have battled against the Goths before coming to the throne, if the passage is really from the pen of a poet who had known Hermanric in 375, Widsith must have attained a great age. It is, perhaps, in favour of the genuineness of the poem that palpable interpolations should occur in several places. If, for example, Widsith had really mentioned Alboin, King of the Lombards, he could not have written until after 568 A.D. So late a date, however, seems irreconcilable with the mention of the Ostrogoths as still settled upon the Vistula, and other geographical details. It is manifest that, while seeming indications of a late date may easily find

their way into an old poem, tokens of antiquity are not likely to be interpolated into a recent one unless with the deliberate purpose of deceit, which seems unlikely here. It is difficult not to be impressed by the apparent sincerity of Widsith's praise of his patrons, and still more difficult to conjecture why a literary imposture should be perpetrated in honour of the deceased sovereigns of an extinct nation two centuries after their death. Widsith, as rendered by Mr. Stopford Brooke, says :—

> For a longish time lived I with Eormanric ;
> There the King of Gotens with his gifts was good to me ;
> He, the Prince of burg-inhabitants, gave to me an armlet
> On the which six hundred scats of beaten gold
> Scorèd were, in scillings reckoned.
> And another gift Ealdhild gave to me,
> Folk queen of the doughty men, daughter of Eadwine,
> Over many lands I prolonged her praise :
> Whensoe'er in singing I must say to men
> Where beneath the sky I had known the best
> Of all gold-embroidered queens, giving lavishly her gifts.

It therefore seems not unlikely that Widsith's lays on the conflicts between the Goths and the Huns really related to those which took place under Hermanric's immediate successors, but that the passage has been altered by a later poet, for whom Attila was the representative of the obliterated Hunnish nation, now passing into the domain of legend. An additional argument for the authenticity of Widsith's poem is the occurrence in it of Slavonic names accepted as real by modern Slavonic scholars.

Apart from the veneration due to so ancient a monument of our tongue, the literary claims of Widsith's poem are but slight. It is chiefly interesting for the picture of the minstrel—sole representative of letters and articulate voice of public opinion—faring from court to court and meeting with honour everywhere—for all have an appetite for praise, and all would fain live in song :—

> Always, South or Northward, some one they encounter,
> Who, for he is learned in lays, lavish in his giving,
> Would before his men of might magnify his sway.
> Manifest his earlship. Till all flits away,
> Life and light together, land who getteth so
> Hath beneath the heaven high established power.

Lament of Deor

Another very interesting poem probably belongs to the pre-Christian era, even though it may have undergone modification in form. This is the **Lament of Deor**, an ancient Teutonic bard, perhaps mythical, who bewails his eclipse in popular favour by another bard, Heorrenda, the Horant of the German epic of Gudrun, precisely as, in after ages, Addison and Scott were, as poets, dethroned by Pope and Byron. Deor's behaviour recalls Scott's rather than Addison's ; he indulges in no railing against his successful rival, but, unable to rehabilitate himself

by writing Waverley novels, seeks consolation in true Horatian fashion by summoning up the memories of famous men and women of old who have endured adversity without being overcome by it. The case of each is described in a distinct strophe, with the burden :—"That was withstood; so may this be!" This strophical arrangement and refrain are unique in Anglo-Saxon poetry, and on that account highly interesting: they seem the deceptive foreshadowing of an arrested lyrical development. The piece also possesses charm as a sincere utterance of deep feeling. The half-mythical bard may well impersonate some really wronged or slighted minstrel at an Anglo-Saxon court. The absence of every Scriptural or ecclesiastical personage from his types of misfortune seems almost a proof that, even if the poem did not cross the sea along with the invaders of Britain, it was composed in pre-Christian times.

Beowulf

We have now to treat of the most remarkable of all Anglo-Saxon poems, and the only one which, though, strictly speaking, but a narrative of adventures, can be considered to approximate to the character of a national epic. A national epic in any strict sense **Beowulf** is not, for neither the scene nor the personages are English. The leading characters are either Danes or Geats (Goths), whose habitation appears to be in the south of Sweden. Yet the poem is justly regarded as Anglo Saxon and national, for the language is English and the manners depicted are those of the Anglo-Saxons in their ancient seats before their arrival in Britain. Whensoever the poem may have been written, it is, in all respects but one, faithful to the feelings and ideas which obtained at the date of the action, nearly half a century before the conversion of England. The exception is that the poet, though singing heathen times and heathen men in an essentially heathen spirit, is, notwithstanding, himself a Christian, or in any case a heathen whose original work has been manipulated and interpolated by a Christian successor. This tampering is nevertheless so insignificant as scarcely to interfere with the general character of the poem as a noble exhibition of the heroic character as conceived by the northern nations in the fifth century. This prevailing tone of feeling, as well as the probability of its being founded upon heroic lays considerably more ancient than itself, justifies our according *Beowulf* precedence over Caedmon, although, as we shall see, in its present shape it is probably later.

Authorship of Beowulf

The attempts to make *Beowulf* into a nature-myth appear to us exceedingly fanciful. The questions connected with its authorship are almost as intricate as the similar controversies raised with reference to the Homeric poems. Homer and the Homeridæ were at all events Greeks, and celebrated the exploits of their countrymen. It would be naturally expected that when an epic poet arose in Anglo-Saxon England he would find inspiration in the conquests of Hengist and Horsa. On the contrary, he sings entirely of the Goths, and there is no allusion to anything Anglo-Saxon, unless a mention of the mythical King Offa is designed as a compliment to Offa King of Mercia. It was, therefore,

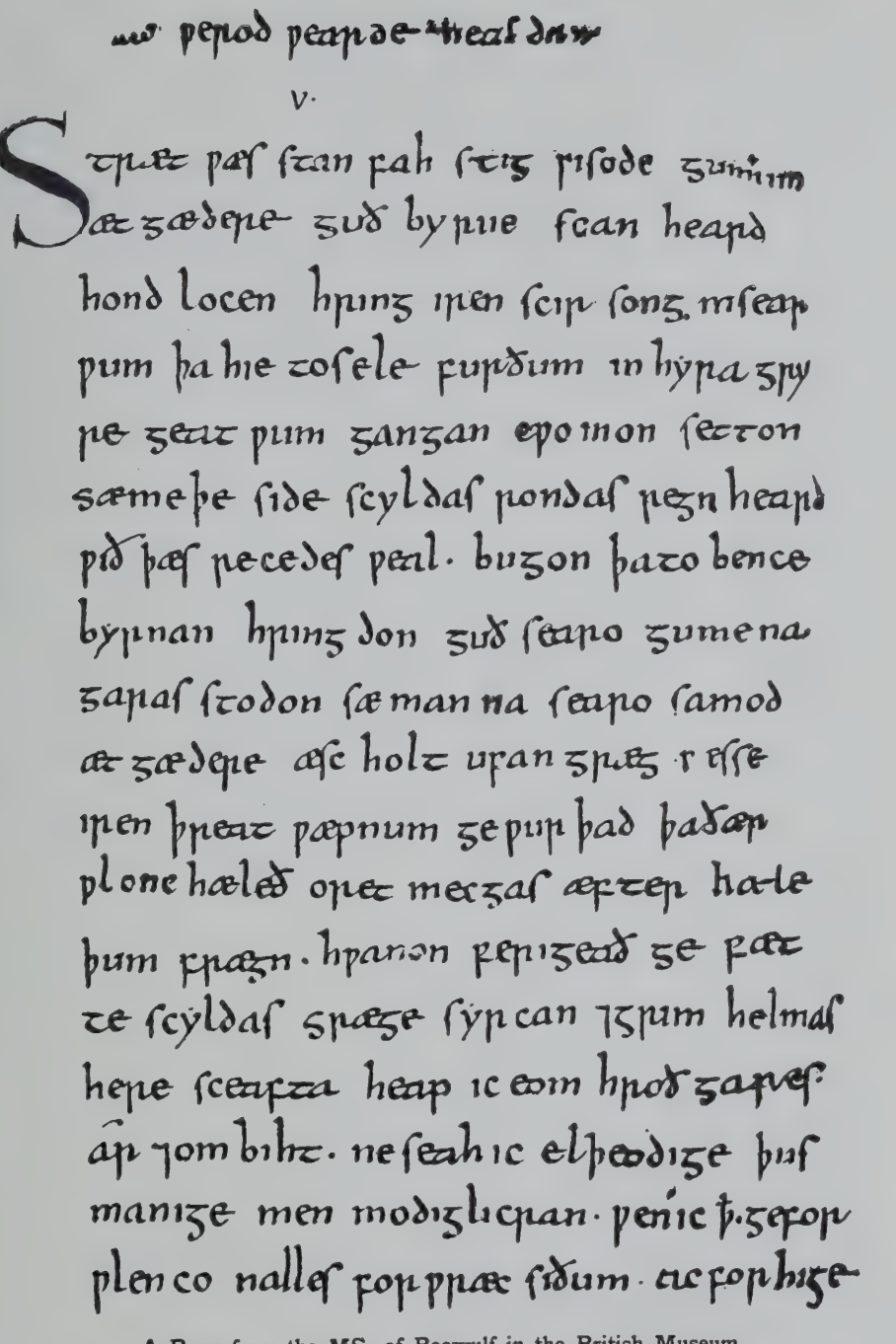
most natural for the first editors of the poem to regard the poet as an Angle, living in the continental Angleland before the time of the emigration to Britain. This attractive theory, nevertheless, is refuted by irrefragable evidence as to the nationality of the personages, who are evidently Goths and not Angles; by the date of the poem, which, although uncertain, may still be brought lower than the Anglian emigration; and by the Christianising passages, unless these can be absolutely proved to be interpolations.

Date of Beowulf

There is, fortunately, one historical allusion in *Beowulf* which suffices to afford a *terminus a quo*—a period previous to which it cannot have existed. This is the expedition of King Hygelac against the Frisians, in which he was defeated and slain. Beyond doubt Hygelac is to be identified with Chochilaicus, recorded by Gregory of Tours and in the *Gesta Regum Franciae* to have been cut off while devastating the lands of the Attuarii, the very tribe (*Het-ware*) mentioned in *Beowulf* as having been attacked by him. This occurred between 512 and 520, and as Beowulf is said in the poem to have afterwards succeeded Hygelac's son on the throne, and to have reigned fifty years, the last note of time could not be earlier than about 570, while it would require nearly another century for Beowulf's history to become sufficiently mythical for epic poetry. We may therefore conclude with confidence that the poem did not exist even in the shape of detached lays before the middle of the seventh century, and must be considerably later in its present form. From a mention of the Merovingian dynasty in France, which did not become extinct until 752, and the absence of any allusion to any person or event of later date, it would seem reasonable to place it before 750, which does not exclude the possibility of a more recent working up. The only known manuscript is of the tenth century, and is in the Cottonian collection in the British Museum. Discovered among the Cottonian Manuscripts by Wanley in 1705, it was, although indicated by him as *tractatus nobilissimus*, entirely neglected until 1786, narrowly escaping destruction in the partial burning of the Cottonian Library. In 1786, the Danish scholar Thorkelin had a transcript made, which he published in 1815. English and German editors followed, and a miniature literature of translation, commentary, and controversy has grown up around this striking poem, which, in its dissimilarity from almost all other relics of Anglo-Saxon literature and the probability that although English it is not in its original shape the work of an Englishman, occupies among the constituents of this literature a position strikingly analogous to that of the Book of Job in the literature of the Old Testament.

Composition of Beowulf

The question most warmly debated is whether this poem of three thousand lines is the composition of a single author or is compacted out of a number of separate ballads. The ingenuity of German criticism has of course been strained and overstrained in support of the latter opinion, which is nevertheless in all probability correct in so far as it maintains that the author of the poem as we have it worked upon pre-existent materials.



A Page from the MS. of Beowulf in the British Museum

Cott. MS. Vitell. A 15

He must otherwise either have translated his poem directly from some Scandinavian original or have composed it in Anglo-Saxon. The former supposition seems little in keeping with the character of literature in that age; but if the poem were entirely of Anglo-Saxon origin, we should, considering that it cannot be much older than the middle of the eighth century, have expected a more decidedly Christian tone, and a less heroic cast of manners. If the poet neither translated nor invented, he can only have adapted; and it is sufficiently probable that lays celebrating a semi-mythical hero like Beowulf may have existed among Beowulf's people and become known to our anonymous Anglo-Saxon bard. To weave these together would be a simple operation, as they would not be rival versions of the same exploits, but successive episodes of the hero's life. Nor would they be numerous—three or four at most—one of which, the lay of Beowulf's conflict with the fire-drake, stands out so distinctly from the rest that one is almost inclined to regard it as entirely the work of the English poet, prompted by the need of providing his epic with a catastrophe.

Probable character and circumstances of author

What manner of man was the Anglo-Saxon author? Most of the critics who have touched upon the question have seemed disposed to regard him as an ecclesiastic, whether priest or monk. He has been conjectured to have been a Saxon missionary to Scandinavia, and regarded as a poet at the court of Offa, King of Mercia, administering instruction in the guise of poetic fiction to that monarch's son. These opinions are contrary to internal evidence. If the author was an ecclesiastic, he was one who had retired into the cloister towards the end of a tempestuous life, and still loved the saga better than the breviary. Had it been otherwise, the references to Christianity must have been more numerous and distinct, and the writer would either have made Beowulf a Christian, converting him in his last moments as Boiardo converts Agricane, or, at least, have depicted his paganism as a lamentable blot upon a character otherwise perfect. But manifestly the poet is not one who would rather "ride with Sir Priest than Sir Knight." He has no ecclesiastical proclivities; he never alludes to bell, book, or candle. He has heard and rejoiced in the clash of battle, and to him the victorious champion—if bounty is associated with bravery—represents the perfection of humanity. Nothing is more marked than his affection for the sea: he has clearly made many voyages, which must have been in the company of sea-rovers. He has the sense of its dreadful might and more dreadful capriciousness which nothing but daily and nightly familiarity can give:—

> Then we two together were in the sea
> The space of five nights, till flood apart drove us,
> The swelling billows, coldest of storms
> Darkening night, and the north wind
> Boisterous and fierce, rough were the waves;
> The sea-fishes' spirit was then aroused.

Nor has he less love for

The spacious boat,
The ring-prowed ship, with battle-weeds laden :

for which he is never tired of inventing new epithets.

The vessel groaned,
Not there the sea-floater did the wind o'er the wave
In its course hinder : the sea-goer went.
The foamy-necked floated forth o'er the water ;
The curvéd-prowed went over the sea-waves
Until the Geats' cliffs they might descry.[1]

The most probable theory

We know from the *Nibelungen Lied* that the hero Folker was a great fighter as well as a great fiddler, and it is not impossible that the writer of *Beowulf* may himself have been a warrior. It is nevertheless more likely that he was a minstrel, who passing, as we have already seen a minstrel pass, from court to court, and chanting the exploits of his royal and princely entertainers, imbibed the spirit of adventure and the command of poetical diction which qualified him to weave the Beowulf lays into an epic. It may even be possible to offer a plausible conjecture as to the period and occasion of his work. Strong reasons, derived from names of places and the character of the scenery, have been assigned for holding him to have belonged to Northumbria. Ten Brink, however, declares the dialect to be Wessex of the best period of the language. But this is no real objection, for scribes habitually altered the dialect of the work they copied into that of their own district. A Mercian poet could scarcely have been so familiar with the sea, and the hypothesis that the poem was composed for the instruction of King Offa's son can hardly be sustained ; the didactic purpose must in that case have been more apparent, and Hrothgar's admonitions to the slayer of Grendel would not apply to a young prince who had done nothing to distinguish himself. The introduction of the name of Offa, even as that of a legendary personage, does, nevertheless, appear significant, and taken in connection with the probably Northumbrian origin of the writer, may afford a clue to the history of the poem. Offa the Great, King of Mercia from 757 to 796, in 792 gave one of his daughters in marriage to Ethelred, King of Northumbria. If we may suppose our probably Northumbrian poet to have been a minstrel at Ethelred's court, the introduction of the name of Offa is explained, and a date obtained, not necessarily for the actual composition of the poem, but for the assumption of its ultimate form. There is nothing in the poem inconsistent with such a supposition, for the poet might well have found and left the allusion to the Merovingians in one of the lays which he fused into his own work.

Analysis of the poem

We must now offer a brief analysis of the epic, whose action is simplicity itself. It is a romance of knight-errantry, one of a type dear to

[1] This and the preceding extracts are from Professor J. M. Garnett's translation, which of the metrical versions is probably the closest to the original. Of the prose versions Mr. T. Arnold's is the most elegant and Professor Earle's the best annotated.

man from the days of Hercules to the days of Amadis, and still, though giants are pacific and dragons extinct, affording the inspiration of many a novel of modern life. Beowulf's first adventure offers a strong resemblance to the Argonauts' delivery of King Phineus from the Harpies. As Phineus is amerced of his food by these obscene invaders, so is Hrothgar, King of the Danes, deprived of his palace by the demon Grendel, who, if any dare to abide there at night, enters it and rends the inmates to pieces. This fiend is powerfully described, and the more so inasmuch as the description leaves much to the imagination. He seems to be a personification of the horror felt by lonely wayfarers in the miry wilderness which he is supposed to make his home. The Christian editor makes him and his fellows descendants of Cain, but the original conception seems to have been that of something unhuman in everything except shape and carnal tissue. The monster must be fought with naked hands, and the strength of Beowulf himself avails no further than to wrench one arm from its socket. This, however, suffices; Grendel flies to his cave and expires. A fresh action, which has every appearance of the addition of a new episode to the original poem or the incorporation of a separate lay into it, now arises from the interposition of a still more frightful fiend in the person of Grendel's mother, a demon of the sea as he is of the morass.[1] She dwells in a sea-cave accessible only by diving, in close relation, however, to the unhallowed mere which had evidently taken the strongest hold on the poet's imagination. Beowulf, pursuing her to avenge the death of one of Hrothgar's nobles whom she has torn to pieces, is gripped by her and borne to this submarine cavern, where he would have perished but for the excellence of his coat of mail which defies her thrusts, and his own skill and luck in possessing himself of a sword from her own armoury, by which alone she can be despatched. He returns in triumph with the head of Grendel, which four ordinary men can hardly bear, and receives thanks and, at the same time, admonition from Hrothgar in a speech dissuading from arrogance and prompting to liberality, which the poet may well have designed to be perpended by his own patrons. The moral tone throughout is very high: and nothing is more remarkable than the vein of pity blended with abhorrence in the description of the ogres, which indicates a finer spirit of humanity than Homer was able to attain when he drew the Cyclop. The whole story of the hero's overthrow of the demon and his dam must belong to a very ancient stratum of popular legend, for Professor York Powell has shown that it exists in Japanese.

Confirming precept by example, Hrothgar had not omitted to recom-

[1] The figure of the devil's dam or grandmother, so frequent in *Grimm's Tales*, is Celtic as well as Teutonic. In Philip Skelton's description of St. Patrick's Purgatory on Lough Derg, written about the middle of the eighteenth century, he says: "They here show a bas relief of Keeronagh, the devil's mother, a figure somewhat resembling that of a wolf, with a monstrous long tail and a forked tongue." Her legend follows, showing that the carving is not a mere freak of fancy. The idea of the feminine character of the evil principle, indeed, is at least as ancient as the Assyrian mythology.

pense Beowulf with splendid gifts, which Beowulf, on his return to the court of his own sovereign Hygelac, distributes between the king and his nobles, receiving rich bounty from Hygelac in return. An interval of fifty years is now supposed to occur, at the end of which we find Beowulf, advanced in years, but with strength and valour unabated, ruling the kingdom of Hygelac, who, as already mentioned, had perished in an expedition against the Frisians. His reappearance, nevertheless, is in his old character as knight-errant, which he is obliged to resume in consequence of the devastation wrought in his realm by a fiery dragon. The dragon on his part has a good case. The treasure over which he watched has been robbed of a golden cup by one of Beowulf's nobles, and he must have revenge. This hoard, it seems, was not originally entrusted to his keeping, but discovered by him. It was buried long ago by an ancient king, the last of his line, who, in the spirit of Goethe's King of Thule, grudged his treasure to posterity, so bitterly did he feel that "all, all were gone, the old familiar faces." His touching lament breathes a tenderer strain than any other passage in the poem, and may well be incorporated from some other source :—

Hold thee here, O Earth, nor the heroes could not.
Hold the wealth of earls ! Lo, within thee long ago
Warriors good had gotten. Ghastly was the life-bane
And the battle death that bore every bairn away.
All my men, mine own, who made leaving of this life !
They have seen their joy in hall !. None is left the sword to bear
Or the cup to carry, chased with flashes of gold,
Costly cup for drinking. All the chiefs have gone elsewhere.
Now the hardened helm, high adorned with gold,
Of its platings shall be plundered. Sleeping are the polishers,
Those once bound to brighten battle-masks for war.
So alike the battle sark that abode on field
O'er the brattling of the boards, biting of the swords,
Crumbles, now the chiefs are dead. And the coat of ringéd mail
May far and wide no longer fare with princes to the field
At the side of heroes. Silent is the joy of harp,
Gone the glee-wood's mirth ; never more the goodly hawk
Hovers through the hall ;[1] the swift horse no more
Beats with hoof the Burh-stead. Thus, unhappy did he weep
In the day and night, till the Surge of Death
On his heart laid hold.

The dragon is brilliantly described ; he is a winged, fire-breathing serpent, provided with at least two feet, and an adamantine covering for his head, but his body is soft and penetrable. His great defence consists in the clouds of poisonous fire he breathes forth, which so intimidate Beowulf's

[1] This passage raises an interesting question. The *Encyclopædia Britannica* says that hawking was introduced into England from the Continent about 860, but this mention of domesticated hawks would seem to prove it earlier. If the Scandinavians were not acquainted with it by the eighth century, this portion of *Beowulf* at any rate must be the original work of an Anglo-Saxon poet. We know not what evidence on the point may be attainable ; it is certain that the finest falcons come from Iceland. The Celtic romances are too late or too interpolated to contribute much to the elucidation of the subject.

nobles that all fly but one, who succours his lord, and turns the battle in his favour. But the poison has done its work; and Beowulf, seeing himself nigh to death, commands his faithful follower to bring forth the dragon's hoard for him to feast his eyes on, and in dying directs his corpse to be burned on a headland, and a barrow heaped up over the remains—

> Which may for my folk for remembering of me,
> Lift its head high on the Hrones-ness;
> That sea-sailing men, soon in days to be,
> Call it 'Beowulf's Barrow,' who, their barks afoam,
> From afar are driving o'er the ocean mists.

This is accordingly done, the treasure is interred with the hero, and the poem which had begun with a sea-funeral, when the body of King Scyld is sent adrift to sea with all his wealth, ends like the Iliad with a solemn cremation.

Manners of the age of Beowulf

Beowulf is not only a fine poem, but a most interesting relic of the ideas and manners of the remote past. It shows that the Northern peoples of its age were by no means barbarous, but that even material civilisation was fairly advanced among them; while, except for the general licence of warring and plundering, their morality was high and pure. Whether a single work or compacted of separate lays, it seems to imply a considerable poetical literature now lost. The authors were men of real poetical genius, who laboured under the disadvantages of paucity of impressions and ideas, diction unrefined by study and practice, and a cramping system of versification. *Beowulf* has not been without influence on later English poetry, Arnold's description of the funeral of Balder, and Morris's of the combats of Jason and his companions with the "ugly, nameless, dull-scaled things," may be distinctly traced back to it; and the comparison shows that the steady expansion of the human mind by the exercise of thought and the accumulation of knowledge has been hardly less favourable to poetry than to science.

Episodes in Beowulf

Beowulf does not stand quite alone among the Anglo-Saxon poems of the period; enough, indeed, is left to have rendered probable, even had *Beowulf* been lost, the existence of a considerable romantic and metrical literature which had disappeared in the unheroic atmosphere of later monkish ideals and amid the catastrophe of the Norman Conquest. Among several episodes introduced or alluded to in *Beowulf* in such a way as to suggest that they formed the themes of independent poems, is one—"The Fight at Finnsburg"—on the same subject as another poem apparently of the same period, about fifty lines of which have been preserved. The two pieces help to complete each other. The personages are Jutes and Frisians, those of another fragment are Germans. A vellum binding in the Royal Library at Copenhagen has preserved two passages from an Anglo-Saxon version of *Walthere*, an originally Teutonic romance of the Nibelungen cycle. The German original is lost, but survives in a Latin translation made in the tenth century: the

Anglo-Saxon version, however, is older than this, and direct from the German. These wrecks of a vanished literature, which may have been extensive, show that the Anglo-Saxon gleemen (*scôpas*) were acquainted with the languages and legends of their neighbours, and justify the conclusion that they had not much invention of their own. As they must have been a numerous body, and their hearers must have required variety, their stock of lays was probably large, much larger than was ever committed to writing. They do not appear to have been organised into a guild, or to have been depositories of ritual or mythic lore like the bards of Wales and Ireland: and the story of Caedmon shows that the guests participated with them in the entertainment of the company.

Anglo-Saxon metre

Before proceeding further with the subject of Anglo-Saxon poetry, it will be convenient to give some account of Anglo-Saxon metre, which cannot be done better than in the words of Vigfusson and Powell (*Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, vol. i. pp. 433, 434). For further details, Schipper's elaborate treatise on English metre may be consulted.

"Every line of old Teutonic poetry is a blank verse divided into two halves by a line-pause which always comes at the end of a word.

"Each half is made up of a fixed number of measures; a measure being a word, or a number of words, of which the first root-syllable is shaped, *i.e.*, forcibly pronounced, as one does in speaking when one wishes to draw attention to a particular word or syllable. In every line two stress syllables at least, one in each half line, must begin with a similar consonant or a vowel.

"In many lines there occur one or more unstressed syllables, which form, as it were, the elastic unmeasured part of the line; these for want of a better term we call slurred syllables, or collectively a slur. It is not meant that these syllables are gabbled over, they may be spoken fast or slow, but that they are redundant or unimportant for the 'make' or structure of the verse, and that they would be less emphasised, and spoken in a less vigorous tone than the rest of the line. There may be one or more slurs in a line.

"When a monosyllabic word is stressed and followed by no enclitic words before the next stress, it is succeeded by a short interval of silence, which we call a rest. Such a monosyllable with its rest is a measure in itself."

Difficulties of Anglo-Saxon poets

It appears then that, like almost all the poetry of primitive nations, the structure of Anglo-Saxon poetry was trochaic and alliterative. The Greeks, the Indians, and in modern times the Italians have been enabled to ascend from this lowly plane to rich complication and voluminous harmony of metre, and less gifted nations have had to learn from these. In so doing they have parted with much of their originality, but have gained immensely in variety and flexibility. In estimating the merits of the Anglo-Saxon poets we must remember that they were hampered no less by the imperfection of their metrical system than by the poverty

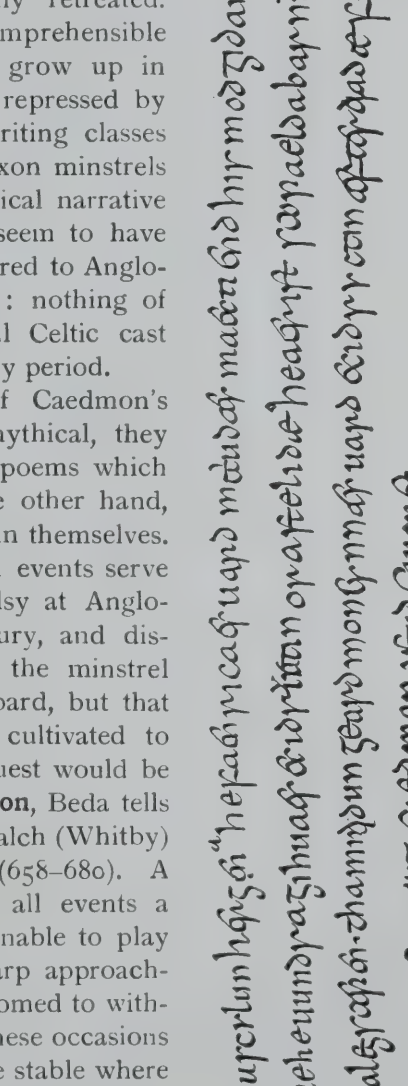
of their vocabulary. The progress of amendment would have been very tardy if it had not been accelerated by the drastic remedy of subjugation by foreigners on a higher level of culture. If we are correct in our view of the date and locality of *Beowulf*, which, as regards the first point at least, is that generally accepted by modern criticism, we must be the more impressed by the greatness of a poem which, however glossed or interpolated in parts to suit the new belief, stands out in the main as a relic of the past, a grand rough creation of the heroic age, which might well have been contemporary with the events which it professes to celebrate. It is the more impressive from the contrast it affords to the Biblical school of poetry which had grown up since the conversion of the Saxons, and which represented the dominant taste and prevalent feeling of the period. At first sight *Beowulf* seems like a Milton writing in the age of Pope; we shall, however, find reason to conclude that the tradition of the past was not in fact so entirely abolished. There were idyllic poets who stood aloof from Christianity, and fervent believers in Christ as heathen in spirit as any Viking. It will nevertheless be best for the present to devote our attention to the two principal literary names which, whether those of individuals or of schools of composition, adorn the seventh and eighth centuries of Saxon England.

Northumbrian school of poetry

It is an ordinary phenomenon for literature, especially poetical literature, to be for a considerable time confined in its manifestations to a single nook of an extensive country. Ionian Greece in the days of Homer, Sicily and afterwards Tuscany in the early ages of Italian literature, Massachusetts in modern America, are familiar examples. For all these good reasons can be given; but it is not evident why, although the very earliest post-Christian productions of Anglo-Saxon literature—glossaries of merely linguistic interest—appear to proceed from Kent, Anglo-Saxon poetry should for a long period have been almost restricted to Northumbria. The fact — wheresoever *Beowulf* may have been written — seems indubitable. Of the two representative poets of whom we are now to treat, **Caedmon** was certainly Northumbrian, and although there is no direct evidence as respects **Cynewulf**, the maritime descriptions and allusions in the poems written by or ascribed to him almost prove that the author or authors were dwellers by the sea. The most probable explanation of the advanced literary position of Northumbria at the period would seem to be that which connects it with the evangelising exertions of Celtic missionaries. As already remarked, the ancient British churches, estranged by resentment and racial hatred, had done nothing for the conversion of the barbarous invaders before the mission of Augustine. After, however, the example thus shown them, they appear to have discerned where their duty and their interest lay; and the proximity of Northumbria to the great Celtic sanctuary of Iona and the British kingdom of Cumbria, as well as the survival of a Celtic population in some Northumbrian districts, would naturally indicate it as a sphere for missionary effort. It is important to observe

that the Celtic monks, though employing Latin in the services of the Church, would be much less Latinised than the Italian missionaries in the south. Comparatively exempt from classical influences, they at the same time were by no means animated by a fraternal spirit towards the Romans, and the flight of the Roman Archbishop Paulinus from York in 633 for long left them a clear field. Celtic clergy came to Northumbria in 634 on the invitation of King Oswald, and it was not until 664 that they finally retreated. Under these circumstances, it is comprehensible that Anglo-Saxon literature might grow up in Northumbria while it was elsewhere repressed by the addiction of the reading and writing classes to Latin literature, and that Anglo-Saxon minstrels would feel at liberty to versify Biblical narrative in their own manner. This would seem to have been the extent of the service rendered to Anglo-Saxon poetry by the British clergy: nothing of the visionary and delicately fanciful Celtic cast of thought is to be detected in it at any period.

If the circumstances related of Caedmon's initiation into the poetic art are mythical, they at least attest the celebrity of the poems which gave birth to the legend; if, on the other hand, they are authentic, they are a poem in themselves. Whichever view is taken, they at all events serve to show the prevalence of minstrelsy at Anglo-Saxon banquets in the seventh century, and disclose the very interesting fact that the minstrel was not invariably a professional bard, but that music and singing were sufficiently cultivated to warrant the expectation that every guest would be able to bear a part in them. **Caedmon**, Beda tells us, lived nigh the abbey of Streoneshalch (Whitby) in the time of the Abbess Hilda (658–680). A farm servant in all probability, at all events a simple and unlettered man, he was unable to play or sing, and whenever he saw the harp approaching him at a banquet he was accustomed to withdraw in haste. Having on one of these occasions fled from the banqueting-room to the stable where he was engaged in tending cattle, he fell asleep and dreamed that he heard a voice commanding

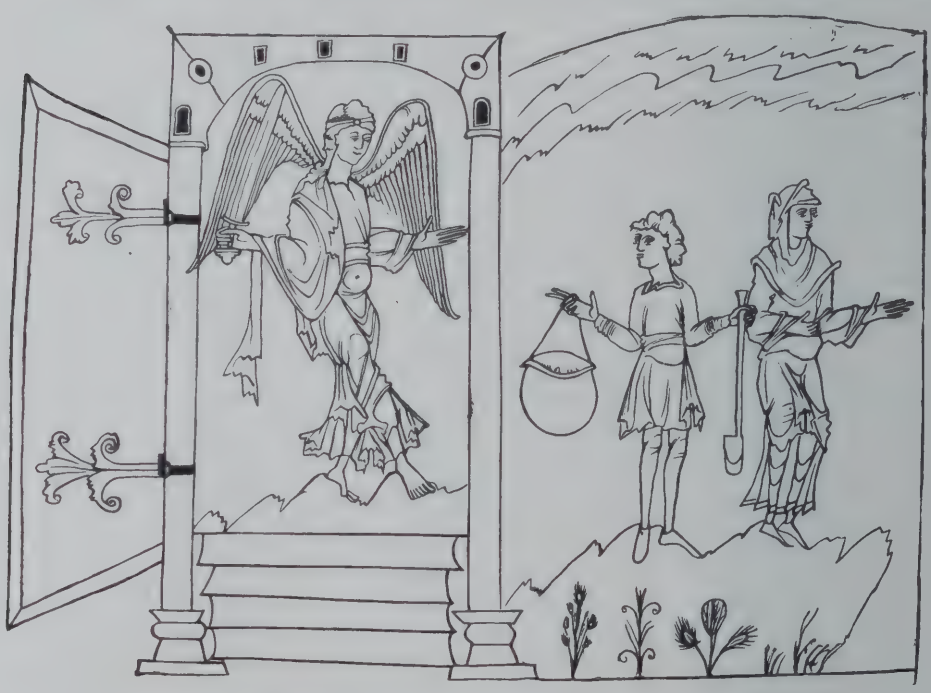


Caedmon's Hymn, the oldest Christian poem in Anglo-Saxon

From an eighth-century MS. in the University of Cambridge

Caedmon

him to sing. His excuses not being accepted he made the attempt, and to his astonishment found himself hymning the praise of the Creator. On awakening he remembered the verses he had composed, and recited them to the steward under whom he served, who brought him to the Abbess. His poetical gift was duly attested and authenticated, and he spent the remainder of his life in versifying Scripture under the patronage of the abbey. There is really no reason to doubt the substantial veracity of the story; although, were it now possible to investigate the circumstances on the spot, we should probably find that Caedmon was already versed



Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise

From the Caedmon MS. (tenth century) in the Bodleian Library

in the Scriptures as an auditor if not as a reader, and that his reluctance to perform his part as a minstrel was rather the effect of timidity than of absolute inability. The endeavour to make him a mythical personage may safely be dismissed. It would be impossible to find a more trustworthy authority than Beda, who was actually the contemporary of Caedmon's latter years.

Poems attributed to Caedmon

The poetry attributed entirely or in part to Caedmon has come down to us in a single manuscript, discovered by Archbishop Ussher, and now preserved in the Bodleian Library. It nowhere claims to be the work of Caedmon, and the ascription of a large portion of its contents to him by its original editor, Franciscus Junius, is grounded upon their substantial agreement with the description of Beda, who actually gives the general sense

of the exordium in a Latin version sufficiently in accord with the diction of the Bodleian MS. to render it, all discrepancies notwithstanding, nearly certain that he is following the same text. King Alfred, or the translator who worked under his direction, rendering Beda into Anglo-Saxon, gives indeed quite a different text as Caedmon's; but it seems almost certain that, not having the poet himself to refer to, he is merely turning Beda's Latin back into the vernacular. Beda further gives an account of Caedmon's

Anglo-Saxon representation of Musicians

From a manuscript Psalter (eighth century) in the British Museum

writings which agrees with the contents of the MS. to a considerable extent. He describes them as paraphrases of Genesis and Exodus, "with many other histories of holy writ," also of the New Testament, and of poems on the world to come. So far as Genesis is concerned, the description, with one remarkable exception to be noticed, tallies exactly; and "the other histories" may be thought to be represented by a paraphrase of Daniel, also in the MS. The Caedmonian authorship of the Exodus is questioned on the ground of its superior poetical merit, and the internal evidence it seems to afford of the poet's having been a warrior. The poems contained in the MS. which relate to the New Testament and the invisible world do not agree so well, there are also linguistic variations, and the hand-

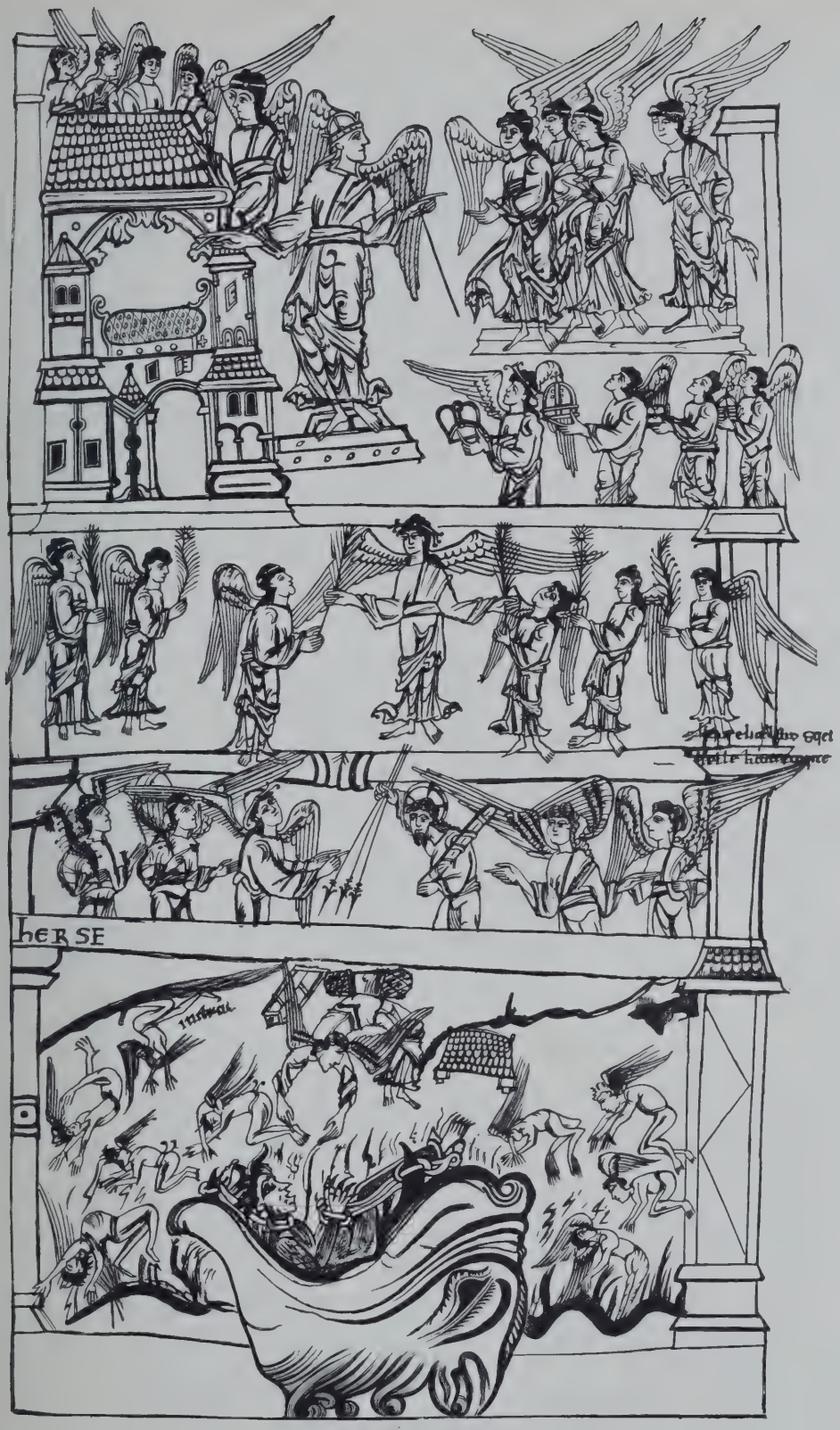
writing is that of a different scribe. There seems, therefore, good reason for concluding that Genesis, with one important exception to be named immediately, and possibly Exodus and Daniel, were written by Caedmon; and the other pieces by poets of his school, who, Bede says, were numerous.

Poem on the Temptation

The exception we have noted to the generally Caedmonian authorship of the Genesis is the remarkable history of the Temptation of Adam and Eve, commonly known as "Genesis B.," which it is difficult to believe unknown to Milton. Critics are nearly unanimous in regarding it as improbable that this striking poem should have been written by the paraphrast of Genesis and Exodus, and the improbability is increased by its evident relation to the old German poem of the Heliand, written in the eighth century, whose author was sufficiently erudite to have been indebted to the Latin poems of Avitus, Bishop of Vienne. The Heliand ("Saviour") is of course solely concerned with the New Testament, but seems to imply a corresponding poem on the Old, existing at present solely in the Anglo-Saxon fragment known as "Genesis B." In any case this is at least two centuries later than Caedmon. As might be expected, the gentle diffident minstrel, whose doubts and fears kept him back from song for half a century, excels chiefly in tender passages, such as the following description of the Dove and the olive-tree, thus rendered by Mr. Stopford Brooke:—

Ruthwell Cross

Far and wide she flew,
Glad in flying free, till she found a place
Fair, where she might rest. With her feet she stept
On a gentle tree. Gay of mood she was and glad,
Since she, sorely tired, now could settle down,
On the branches of the tree, on its bearing mast
There she fluttered feathers, went a-flying off again,



Defeat of the Bad Angel

From Caedmon MS. (tenth century) in the Bodleian Library

With her booty flew, brought it to the sailor,
From an olive-tree a twig, right into his hands
Brought the blade of green.

This is pretty and tasteful embroidery, but the poet does not invent; he simply amplifies and adorns the matter before him. The poet of the Temptation and the Fall, however indebted he may be to Avitus for hints, shows true original genius in his additions to his text; his pictures of Satan bound in the infernal regions, of the loyalty of the infernal retainer who performs the errand to Eden at his lord's behest, and of the subtlety by which Eve is overcome Unlike Milton, he conceives of Satan as so straitly fettered in the deeps of hell as to be unable to put his designs against the human race into execution by his personal efforts, and compelled to solicit the aid of one of his *thanes*. The immense loss in sublimity which this involves is almost compensated by the closeness to human nature :—

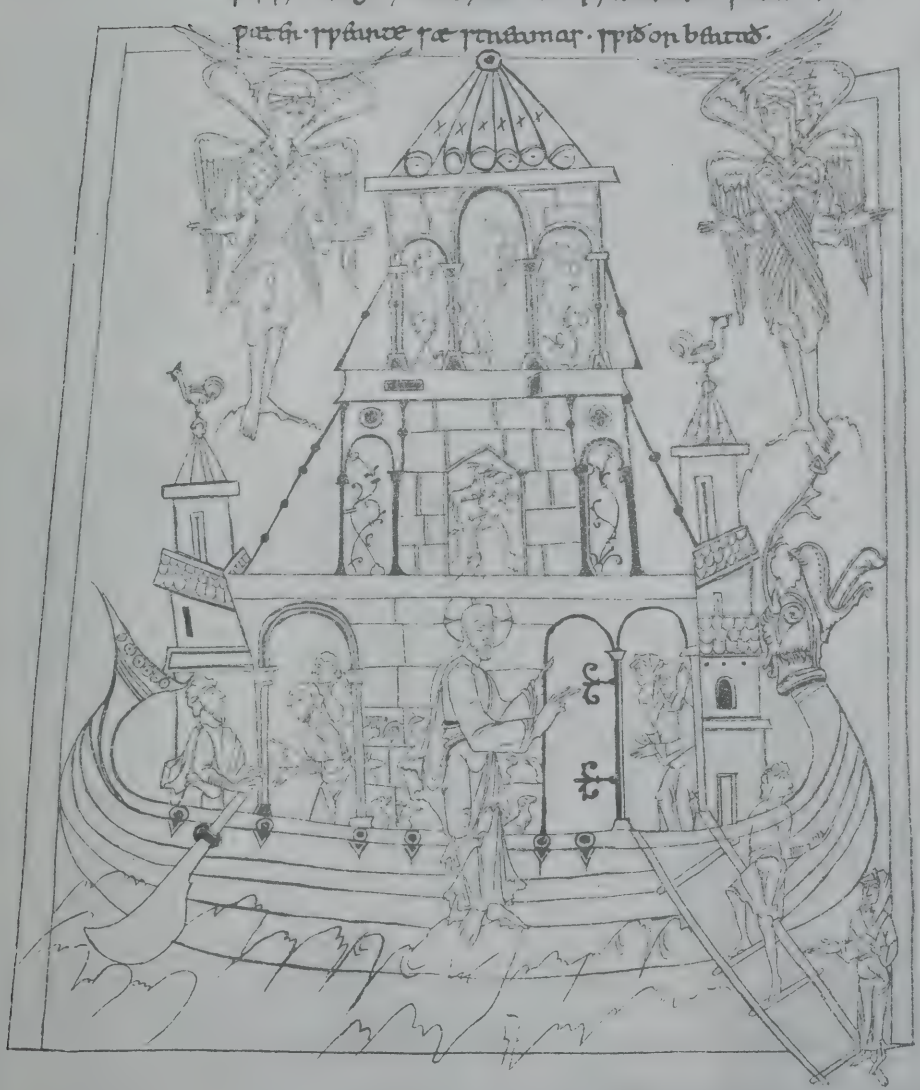
If I to any thane
lordly treasure
in former times have given
while we in the good seats
blissful sate ;
at no more acceptable time
could he ever with value
my bounty requite.
If men for this purpose
any one of my thanes
would himself volunteer
that he from here upward
and outward might go ;
might come through these barriers,
and strength in him had
that with raiment of feather
his flight he could take,
and whirl through the welkin,
where the new work is standing
—Adam and Eve
in the earthly realm
with wealth surrounded—
and we are cast away hither
in these deep dales !

Keats justly eulogises Milton for placing vales in hell, but it will be seen that the Anglo-Saxon poet had been beforehand with him.

When the contents of the Bodleian MS. were given to the world by Franciscus Junius they were unaccompanied by any Latin version, and Milton's sight had failed him. Yet it is hardly possible to believe him unacquainted with a poem from which he continually seems to be borrowing, while he no less continually improves it. Nothing could be more natural than for Junius to present his book to the Commonwealth's Latin Secretary, and when Milton, his mind fraught with his growing epic, discovered that the volume contained a poem on the same subject, he would assuredly seek and find an interpreter. Considering the naturalisation—far more complete than in any other country—which the Bible was to undergo in England, and the extent to which English literature was to be permeated by it, the derivation of the earliest Anglo-Saxon poems from the Scriptures is a phenomenon of the deepest significance.

The authorship of the Exodus poem presents a problem. The spirit certainly seems too martial for the author of *Exodus*, but on the other hand we have Bede's distinct testimony that Caedmon did compose a para-

Noe fyrmest fra hine nergend heht hyrde þam hal
gan hlafdon cyninge ongan orfcype lice þ hof fyrcan
mycle mihte cistae magum fraegde þ wæs hrofaes þing
þrymmum tofaemed fedde fitte hie nephewen fæs ge
fadh þa ymb pinqua popn pæs fæste mæcod gifrom
hupa mæste gasta hlipgan innan futan wundan
lime gesæstnod wid flode fæs noh by gelstran
þ is fyndrig cynn symle bið by heardra þeh hreoh
ne stih fyrmce fæ fremmar fyrdon bearfad



From a MS. of Caedmon's Hymn.

[*Bodleian Library, Oxford.*]

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phrase of Exodus, and it seems scarcely possible that the work of an author of such celebrity should have been extinguished by an anonymous writer. On the whole it appears safest to attribute the poem to him. The Daniel is more dubious.

Poems erroneously ascribed to Caedmon

The poems on New Testament history or legend comprised in the Bodleian MS. are considerably later than the genuine Caedmon, if the paraphrases of Genesis and Exodus are rightly attributed to him. They manifest the same independence and invention as the poem on the Fall in the Old Testament series, and may well be attributed to its author. The spirit is totally unlike that which Bede would lead us to ascribe to Caedmon; it is vindictive, unchristian, and far below the substantially heathen Beowulf. They consist of several poems, on the Fall of the Angels, the Temptation of Christ, the Harrowing of Hell, the Resurrection, and other subjects from the New Testament, welded into one by the transcriber. *The Dream of the Holy Rood* has been ascribed to Caedmon in consequence of some lines from it being engraved on the Ruthwell Cross with the statement "Cadmon wrought me," but this clearly refers to the sculptor, and the poem is almost certainly by Cynewulf or one of his disciples. There remains a considerable fragment of an elaborate poem on the history of Judith, which has been ingeniously conjectured to have been composed in compliment to Queen Judith, Ethelwulf's wife and Alfred's stepmother, but is more probably a production of one of Caedmon's Northumbrian group some time in the eighth century. Some have deemed the author but mediocre as a poet; others have judged his work more favourably; and their opinion, we think, will be deemed fully confirmed by the brilliant translation of Professor Oliver Elton in the volume of essays published in 1900 in honour of Dr. Furnivall. This, by the favour of Professor Elton and the Delegates of the Clarendon Press, we are enabled to cite at full length, and it will be found a perfect specimen of the average style of Anglo-Saxon poetry:—

Translation of "Juaith"

Large is the face of our world, but she loosed not trust in His gifts,
And sure was the sheltering grace of His hand, in her sharpest call
To the Prince, who presides, far-famed, in the height, to protect her now
From the worst of the Fear; and the Lord of His creatures willed her the boon
For her fulness of faith in the glorious omnipotent Father enskied.
And the heart grew fain, as I heard, within Holofernes the king,
And he sent forth a bidding to wine, a banquet of bravery measureless
For all the eldest of thanes in the orders of shielded fighters,
And the chiefs of the folk came quick to that mighty captain of theirs.

And fourth was the day since the fairily-radiant
Damsel had sought him, the deep-souled Judith;
And they fared to the feast, his fellows in sorrow,
And with lust of the wine-cup uplifted was every
Breast of the warrior in battle-mail.

And they bore down the benches the beakers lofty
Full cups and flagons for feasting in hall;
And the soldiers seized them, the strong men in bucklers,

Who were sealed—and their sovereign saw not—to death.
And the giver of gold was gay with the revel,
Holofernes, the fear and the friend of his earls,
And he laughed aloud, and hallooed and shouted
In fierceness of mood, and far the tempestuous
Clamour was caught by the children of mortals
As mad with the mead-cup he monished them often
To bear themselves bravely at board and be men
Curst was his soul, and his company doughty he
Drowned in their drink while the daylight held,
And he whelmed them in wine, the warriors all,
Till they lay at the last like dead men stricken, in languor lapped,
With good things gorged by their valorous giver of treasure. And he
Saw they were served as they sat in the feast-hall
Till dusk had descended nigh on the world.
And he bade them, that soul of all sins commingled,
To bring to his bed the blest among women,
Bracelet-laden, and lordly with rings.
And swiftly his servants set to the will of
The mailed ones' master, and made in a flash
To the guest-room of Judith, of judgement deep.
And they found her, and fetched the fairest of ladies
To his tall-arched tent, the targeted warriors,
Where the lord Holofernes, the loathed of the Saviour,
Slept through the nights ; and encircling the couch
Was a curtain all netted of comeliest gold
For the captain of war and contriver of harms
To watch on the warriors that went to his chamber,
And be noted by none that came near him of mortals
Whom he called not in quest of their counsel himself,
The prince in his pride, from the proven in battle.

And they carried unto his couch the woman whose cunning was sure,
And the mind of the men was o'ercast as they went to their master with word
That the heavenly maid had been brought to the bower ; and he, their lord
The leader of cities, the famous, was stirred to laughter of heart,
And was fain to defile the bright one and tarnish her fairness. God,
Wielder of war-men, and Guardian of might, and Awarder of fame,
Kept the king from his deed, and let not the crime betide.
Then his heart was hot with his lust, and he went, the hellish of soul,
Mid the press of his princes, along to his bed, where the pride of his life
Was to finish before the morn ; not soft was the fortune here
Of the monarch of many, the puissant of soul, but meet for his works
On earth done under the sky, and his mind was empty of wit
As he stumbled to sleep his fill, the chieftain sodden with wine.

Then strode the soldiers straight from the chamber,
Drenched in their drink ; they had drawn the detested one,
False to his faith and fell to his people, the
Last time on earth to his lair, in haste.

And the handmaid of God in her heart took counsel
Swiftly to slay, as he slumbered, the terrible
Lecher unclean, for her Lord ; and His maiden
With coiling tresses, caught from its scabbard
A sword that was scoured unto sharpness of temper ;
And next she besought by His Name the Redeemer of

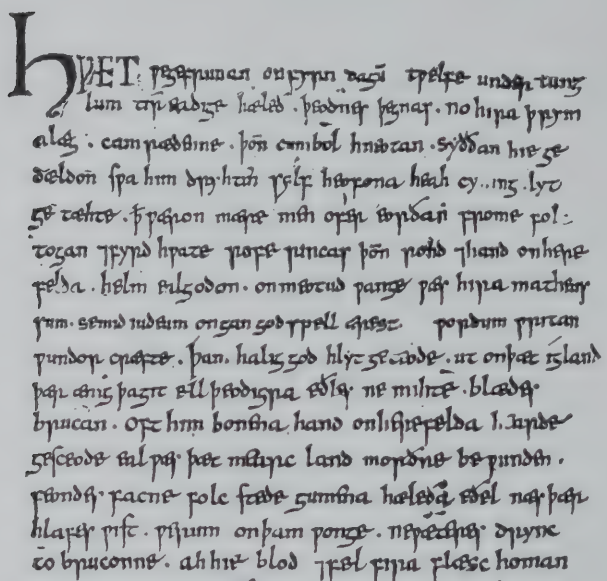
Men upon earth by His might in the firmament:
Chief of Thy creatures and Child of Omnipotence,
Spirit of comfort and Star of the Trinity,
Give me Thy grace in my greatness of trouble.
For my heart is afire within, and my soul is heavy, and sore
Sunken in sorrow; be mine of Thy grace, O Sovereign above,
Conquest, and keenness of faith that my sword shall cut him in twain,
Murder's minister yonder! And mighty One, Master of all,
Glory-allotter to men, and great in Thy majesty, now
Favour and save me, of mercy, in this my fulness of need;
Wreak for the wrath and the flame of my soul a repayment. And soon
He in the highest who sits made sharp her heart in its strength,
As He may for us men who entreat Him aright and with meetness of faith;
And the heart of the holy maid was enlarged, and her hope made new.

And hard she haled by the hair the idolater
Deadly and hateful, and dragged him disdainfully
Forth to her featly, to fall at her mercy.
And the sword of the maiden with sinuous tresses
Flickered and fell on the furious-hearted
Bane of his foes, bit into his neck-bone.
And drunken he lay there, drowned in a stupor,
And life in him lingered, though large was his wound.
And she smote with the strength of her soul once more
At the heathenish hound, and the head rolled over
Forth on the floor; and the filthy carrion
Lay on the bed without life; but the spirit had
Fared away far in the fathomless underworld,
To be hampered in hell-pains and humbled eternally,
Wreathen with serpents in regions of torment,
Fettered and fast in the flame of perdition.
He has done with our life; nor dare he have hope
In the heart of the dark habitation of dragons
Thence to depart, but he there must abide
In that dwelling of dimness, undawned on of joy,
Ever and ever for infinite ages.

Poems of Cynewulf and his school

The other important group of Anglo-Saxon Christian poetry, inferior in antiquity and legendary interest to the Caedmonian collection, but not in poetical merit, is that associated with the name of Cynewulf. The circumstances under which these poems have reached us are analogous to those which have preserved Caedmon. They exist in two manuscripts, the Exeter MS. of Anglo-Saxon poetry given by Bishop Leofric to Exeter Cathedral in 1046, and treasured there ever since, and a similar MS. in the cathedral library at Vercelli, discovered in 1832. The poems in the two MSS. are not the same, and we should have no clue to the authorship of any of them but for the fortunate and simultaneous discovery of Mitchell Kemble and Jacob Grimm, afterwards completed by Professor Napier, that runic letters interwoven with the text of two of the Exeter poems, the *Crist* and the *Juliana*, and two of the Vercelli poems, the *Elene* and the *Andreas*, more commonly called the *Fata Apostolorum*, for the poem usually so entitled is in fact but a fragment of it, disclose the name of Cynewulf. A similar cryptogram has been detected by some in a collection of metrical riddles and gnomic verses,

some highly poetical, also preserved in the Exeter book, but this has been disputed by others, and cannot be regarded as fully established. Such of them, nevertheless, as do not too manifestly savour of an earlier age, may very well be youthful productions of Cynewulf. He may also be the author of *The Dream of the Rood* in the Vercelli book, and perhaps of the *Phœnix*, a paraphrase of the poem ascribed to Lactantius, supplying the deficient Christian application, and of the long and important poem on the life of St. Guthlac in the Exeter MS. The *Andreas*, a long poem on the fabulous adventures of St. Andrew and St. Matthew in *Mermedonia*, and the other poems in the two MS. books, may be attributed to poets of Cynewulf's school.



Facsimile of Anglo-Saxon MS. of Eleventh Century

From the Cathedral Library at Vercelli

In the *Elene*, which is undoubtedly Cynewulf's, he has fortunately related some particulars of himself, enabling us to fill up what would otherwise be the merest outline of a shadowy figure. He had been, he tells us, devoted in his youth to the chase and the banquet and worldly pleasures, but in his old age had become studious, religious, and meditative: also, we must suppose, though he does not expressly say so, sufficiently erudite to study ecclesiastical legends at first hand. He had, as a young man, been rewarded with golden gifts for his songs, which we must take to have been his own composition, and whose loss is greatly to be deplored. It would be natural that his serious mood and advanced age should lead him to the shelter of a monastery; but the Kenulphus, Abbot of Peterborough,

with whom Kemble and Thorpe identify him, flourished at least two centuries later. There can be little doubt that the poet wrote about the middle of the eighth century, and that his home was Northumbria. As already observed, the existence of his poems as we now have them in the Wessex dialect is no objection to the latter supposition, since the transcriber invariably employed his own form of speech. It is a striking proof of the decay of Anglo-Saxon literature after the Danish invasion that the poems of so remarkable a writer should exist only in a single copy, the Exeter and Vercelli MSS. not containing the same pieces, and that, but for the precaution of a cryptogram, his name would be entirely unknown.

Poetical genius of Cynewulf

Cynewulf is undoubtedly a fine poet. He has two especial notes, earnestness and subjectivity. He feels intensely what he writes, and whether describing an event or a piece of scenery after Scripture, or dealing in exhortation, or expressing his own feelings, always labours to make his utterance as energetic as possible. Though seldom speaking in his own person, he is full of personal feeling: and, as remarked by Mr. Brooke, views his landscape in the hue cast upon it by his own fleeting emotions. In this he entirely differs from Caedmon, who is purely objective. A great step had thus been taken; had a second Cynewulf appeared to carry poetry beyond the sphere of biblical and ecclesiastical history, England might have led Europe in the paths of poetry. There were, as we shall find, decided evidences in the eighth century of an elegiac tendency that had almost ripened into lyric, and it is by no means improbable that such a genius might have arisen, but for the calamities which desolated Northumbria towards the end of the eighth century.

Cynewulf's most important poem is the *Crist*, a metrical narrative of the leading events of Christ's ministry upon earth, including his return to judgment, which is treated with much grandeur but also with great prolixity. The following passage, in Mr. Gollancz's version, is an average specimen of the poem:—

> Now 'tis most like as if we fare in ships
> On the ocean flood, over the water cold,
> Driving our vessels through the spacious seas
> With horses of the deep. A perilous way is this
> Of boundless waves, and there are stormy seas
> On which we toss here in this feeble world
> O'er the deep paths. Ours was a sorry plight
> Until at last we sailed unto the land,
> Over the troubled main. Help came to us
> That brought us to the haven of salvation,
> God's Spirit-Son, and granted grace to us
> That we might know e'en from the vessel's deck
> Where we must bind with anchorage secure
> Our ocean steeds, old stallions of the waves.

After the *Crist*, the most important of the undoubted poems of Cynewulf is the *Elene*, on the Invention of the Cross by the Empress Helena, a piece so full of dramatic incident that it might easily have been converted

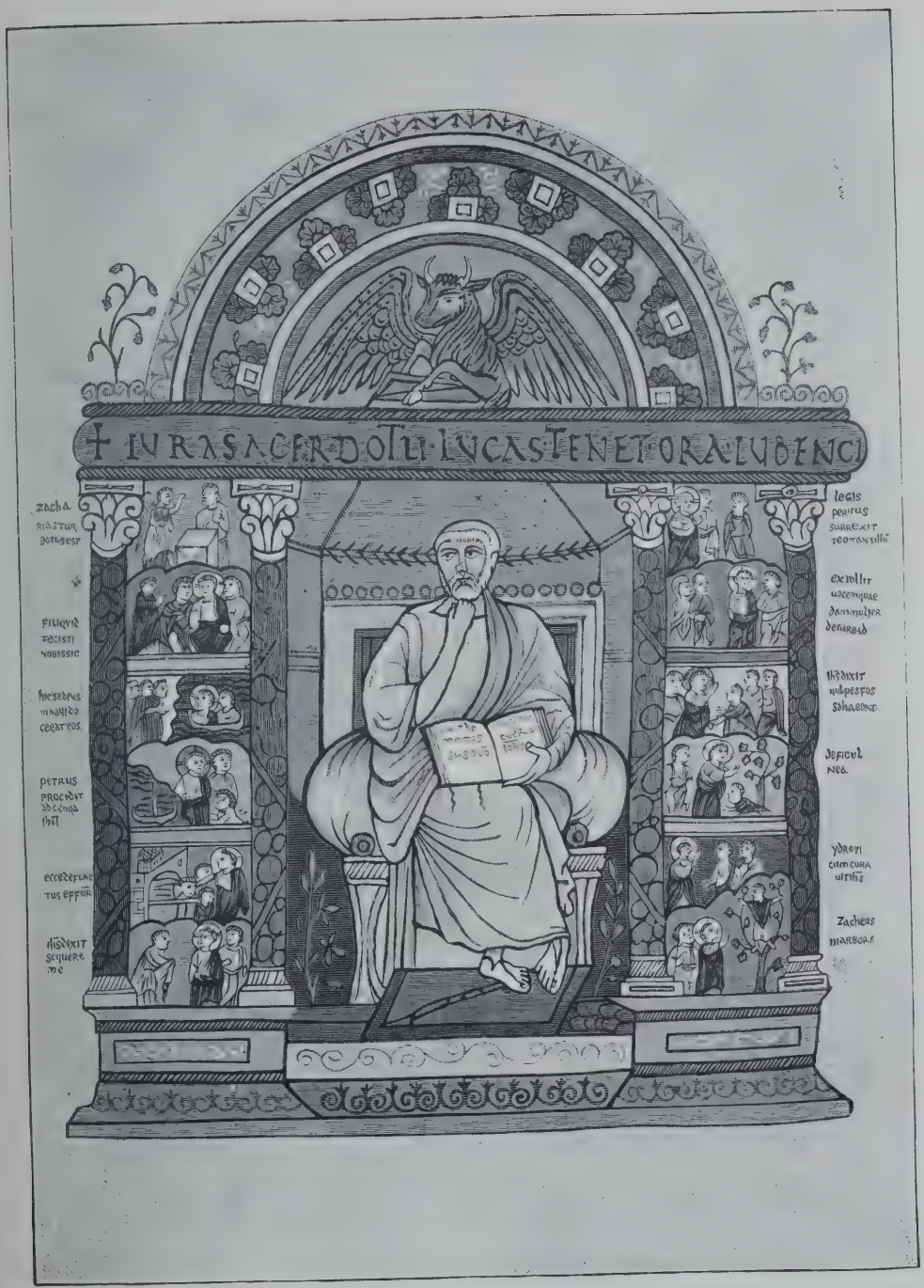
into a miracle play. The other two have less poetical merit than some of the doubtful poems, especially the second part of the *Guthlac* and the *Andreas* and *The Dream of the Rood*. The *Andreas*, indeed, is a poem of rare spirit, which might almost be called a Christian Beowulf, and founded upon a Greek legend of the adventures of St. Matthew and St. Andrew in *Mermedonia*, which, in the author's time, must have also existed in a Latin version. This, as we have seen, is attributed to Cynewulf in the MS. There seems nothing in any of the other pieces actually compelling us to ascribe them to another hand; in the absence, however, of any direct authentication, it is perhaps safest to regard them as vestiges of an eighth-century school of Northumbrian sacred poetry, such as may well have arisen around a master like Cynewulf.

General characteristics of Anglo-Saxon poetry

The general character of Anglo-Saxon Christian poetry of the period before Alfred is excellently conveyed by its French historian. It is, M. Jusserand points out, essentially Northern and Teutonic. "The full infusion of the Latin element, which is to transform the Anglo-Saxons into English, will take place several centuries hence, and will be the result of a last invasion. The genius of the Teutonic invaders continues nearly intact, and nothing proves this more clearly than the Christian poetry composed in the native tongue, and produced in Britain after the conversion. The same impetuosity, passion, and lyricism, the same magnificent apostrophes which gave its character to the old pagan poetry are found again in Christian songs, as well as the same recurring alternatives of deep melancholy and noisy exultation. The Anglo-Saxon poets describe the saints of the Gospel, and it seems as though the companions of Beowulf stood again before us. One of them, St. Andrew, arrives in an uninhabited country; not a desert in Asia, nor a solitude in Greece; it might be the abode of Grendel. 'Then was the saint in the shades of darkness, warrior hard of courage, the whole night long with various thoughts beset; snow-bound the earth with winter casts; cold grew the storms, with hard hail showers; and rime and frost, the hoary warriors, locked up the dwellings of men, the settlements of the people; frozen were the lands with cold icicles, shrunk the water's might; over the river-streams the ice made a bridge, a pale water-road.'"

Northumbrian minstrelsy

There was no want of poetical spirit among the Northumbrian bards of the eighth century. If their performances were not more distinguished, the causes were the rudeness and poverty of the language, the want of adequate metrical structure, and, above all, the general restriction of the poets' themes to a narrow cycle. The time for engrafting foreign forms and naturalising foreign diction had not arrived, and the poets could only make the best of the resources they had. In speaking of the monotony of a literature whose themes were almost exclusively biblical or ecclesiastical, we are proceeding, as we must, by the maxim *de non apparentibus*. It is not improbable that a copious secular literature may have existed which the monastic transcribers, alone empowered to grant passports for


IN DIEBUS HERODIS REGIS IUDEE ERAT QUIDAM SACERDOS NOMINE ZACHARIAS
ZACHARIAS TIMUIT ET TIMOR CECIDIT SUPER EUM
ANGELUS AUTEM DIXIT ZACHARIE NOLI TIMERE
ZACHARIAS DIXIT ANGELO UNDE HOC SCIAM
ET ECCE ERIS TACENS ET NON POTENS LOQUI
ET ERAT POPULUS EXPECTANS ZACHARIAM
ET MIRABANTUR QUOD TARDARET IN TEMPLO
EGRESSUS AUTEM NON POTEBAT LOQUI AD ILLOS
ET INTELLEXERUNT QUIA VISIONEM VIDISSET IN TEMPORE
ET FACTUM EST UT IMPLERENTUR DIES MINISTERII EIUS
ABIIT IN DOMUM SUAM
POST DIES AUTEM ILLOS CONCEPIT ELISABETH UXOR EIUS
ET OCCULTABAT SE DICENS QUIA SIC MIHI FECIT DOMINUS
IN DIEBUS IN QUIBUS RESPEXIT AUFERRE OPPROBRIUM MEUM INTER HOMINES
IN MENSE AUTEM SEXTO MISSUS EST ANGELUS GABRIEL A DEO
IN CIVITATEM GALILEE CUI NOMEN NAZARETH
AD VIRGINEM DESPONSATAM VIRO CUI NOMEN ERAT IOSEPH
ET NOMEN VIRGINIS MARIA
ET INGRESSUS ANGELUS AD EAM DIXIT AVE GRATIA PLENA
DOMINUS TECUM BENEDICTA TU IN MULIERIBUS
QUAE CUM AUDISSET TURBATA EST IN SERMONE EIUS
ET COGITABAT QUALIS ESSET ISTA SALUTATIO
ET AIT ANGELUS EI NE TIMEAS MARIA
INVENISTI ENIM GRATIAM APUD DEUM
ECCE CONCIPIES IN UTERO ET PARIES FILIUM
ET VOCABIS NOMEN EIUS IESUM
HIC ERIT MAGNUS ET FILIUS ALTISSIMI VOCABITUR
ET DABIT ILLI DOMINUS SEDEM DAVID PATRIS EIUS
ET REGNABIT IN DOMO IACOB IN AETERNUM
ET REGNI EIUS NON ERIT FINIS
DIXIT AUTEM MARIA AD ANGELUM QUOMODO FIET ISTUD
QUONIAM VIRUM NON COGNOSCO
ET RESPONDENS ANGELUS DIXIT EI SPIRITUS SANCTUS
SUPERVENIET IN TE ET VIRTUS ALTISSIMI OBUMBRABIT TIBI
ET IDEO QUOD NASCETUR EX TE SANCTUM VOCABITUR FILIUS DEI
ET ECCE ELISABETH COGNATA TUA ET IPSA CONCEPIT FILIUM
IN SENECTUTE SUA ET HIC MENSIS SEXTUS EST
ILLI QUAE VOCATUR STERILIS
QUIA NON ERIT IMPOSSIBILE APUD DEUM OMNE VERBUM
DIXIT AUTEM MARIA ECCE ANCILLA DOMINI
FIAT MIHI SECUNDUM VERBUM TUUM
ET DISCESSIT AB EA ANGELUS
EXSURGENS AUTEM MARIA IN DIEBUS ILLIS
ABIIT IN MONTANA CUM FESTINATIONE
IN CIVITATEM IUDA
ET INTRAVIT IN DOMUM ZACHARIAE
ET SALUTAVIT ELISABETH
ET FACTUM EST UT AUDIVIT SALUTATIONEM MARIAE ELISABETH
EXSULTAVIT INFANS IN UTERO EIUS
ET REPLETA EST SPIRITU SANCTO ELISABETH
ET EXCLAMAVIT VOCE MAGNA ET DIXIT
BENEDICTA TU IN MULIERIBUS
ET BENEDICTUS FRUCTUS VENTRIS TUI
ET UNDE HOC MIHI UT VENIAT MATER DOMINI MEI AD ME
ECCE ENIM UT FACTA EST VOX SALUTATIONIS TUAE IN AURIBUS MEIS
EXSULTAVIT IN GAUDIO INFANS IN UTERO MEO
ET BEATA QUAE CREDIDISTI
QUONIAM PERFICIENTUR ea QUAE DICTA SUNT TIBI A DOMINO
ET AIT MARIA MAGNIFICAT ANIMA MEA DOMINUM
ET EXSULTAVIT SPIRITUS MEUS IN DEO SALUTARI MEO
QUIA RESPEXIT HUMILITATEM ANCILLAE SUAE
ECCE ENIM EX HOC BEATAM ME DICENT OMNES GENERATIONES
QUIA FECIT MIHI MAGNA QUI POTENS EST
ET SANCTUM NOMEN EIUS
ET MISERICORDIA EIUS A PROGENIE IN PROGENIES TIMENTIBUS EUM
FECIT POTENTIAM IN BRACHIO SUO
DISPERSIT SUPERBOS MENTE CORDIS SUI
DEPOSUIT POTENTES DE SEDE
ET EXALTAVIT HUMILES
ESURIENTES IMPLEVIT BONIS
ET DIVITES DIMISIT INANES
SUSCEPIT ISRAEL PUERUM SUUM
RECORDATUS MISERICORDIAE SUAE
SICUT LOCUTUS EST AD PATRES NOSTROS
ABRAHAM ET SEMINI EIUS IN SAECULA
MANSIT AUTEM MARIA CUM ILLA QUASI MENSES TRES
ET REVERSA EST IN DOMUM SUAM
ELISABETH AUTEM IMPLEVIT TEMPUS PARIENDI
ET PEPERIT FILIUM
ET AUDIERUNT VICINI ET COGNATI EIUS QUIA MAGNIFICAVIT DOMINUS MISERICORDIAM SUAM CUM ILLA
ET GRATULABANTUR EI
ET FACTUM EST IN DIE OCTAVO VENERUNT CIRCUMCIDERE PUERUM
ET VOCABANT EUM IN NOMINE PATRIS SUI ZACHARIAM
ET RESPONDENS MATER EIUS DIXIT NON SED VOCABITUR IOHANNES
ET DIXERUNT AD ILLAM QUIA NEMO EST IN COGNATIONE TUA QUI VOCETUR HOC NOMINE
ET INNUEBANT PATRI EIUS QUEM VELLET VOCARI EUM
ET POSTULANS PUGILLARES SCRIPSIT DICENS
IOHANNES EST NOMEN EIUS
ET MIRATI SUNT UNIVERSI
APERTUM EST AUTEM OS EIUS CONTINUO ET LINGUA EIUS
ET LOCUTUS BENEDICEBAT DEUM
ET FACTUS EST IN TIMORE OMNIBUS VICINIS EORUM
ET SUPER OMNIA HAEC VULGATA SUNT IN OMNIBUS MONTIBUS IUDAEAE
ET POSUERUNT OMNES QUI AUDIERANT IN CORDE SUO
DICENTES QUIS PUTAS PUER ISTE ERIT
ET ENIM MANUS DOMINI ERAT CUM ILLO
ET PROPHETAVIT ZACHARIAS PATER EIUS
REPLETUS SPIRITU SANCTO
ET DIXIT BENEDICTUS DOMINUS DEUS ISRAEL
QUIA VISITAVIT ET FECIT REDEMPTIONEM PLEBI SUAE
ET ERIGIT CORNU SALUTIS NOBIS
IN DOMO DAVID PUERI SUI
SICUT LOCUTUS EST PER OS SANCTORUM QUI A SAECULO SUNT PROPHETARUM EIUS
SALUTEM EX INIMICIS NOSTRIS
ET DE MANU OMNIUM QUI ODERUNT NOS
AD FACIENDAM MISERICORDIAM CUM PATRIBUS NOSTRIS
ET MEMORARI TESTAMENTI SUI SANCTI
IUSIURANDUM QUOD IURAVIT AD ABRAHAM PATREM NOSTRUM
DATURUM SE NOBIS
UT SINE TIMORE DE MANU INIMICORUM NOSTRORUM LIBERATI
SERVIAMUS ILLI
IN SANCTITATE ET IUSTITIA CORAM IPSO
OMNIBUS DIEBUS NOSTRIS
ET TU PUER PROPHETA ALTISSIMI VOCABERIS
PRAEIBIS ENIM ANTE FACIEM DOMINI PARARE VIAS EIUS
AD DANDAM SCIENTIAM SALUTIS PLEBI EIUS
IN REMISSIONEM PECCATORUM EORUM
PER VISCERA MISERICORDIAE DEI NOSTRI
IN QUIBUS VISITAVIT NOS ORIENS EX ALTO
ILLUMINARE HIS QUI IN TENEBRIS ET IN UMBRA MORTIS SEDENT
AD DIRIGENDOS PEDES NOSTROS IN VIAM PACIS
PUER AUTEM CRESCEBAT ET CONFORTABATUR SPIRITU
ET ERAT IN DESERTIS USQUE IN DIEM OSTENSIONIS SUAE AD ISRAEL
FACTUM EST AUTEM IN DIEBUS ILLIS EXIIT EDICTUM A CAESARE AUGUSTO
UT DESCRIBERETUR UNIVERSUS ORBIS
HAEC PRIMA DESCRIPTIO FACTA EST A PRAESIDE SYRIAE CYRINO
ET ITABANT OMNES UT PROFITERENTUR SINGULI IN SUAM CIVITATEM
ASCENDIT AUTEM ET IOSEPH A GALILEA DE CIVITATE NAZARETH
IN IUDAEAM IN CIVITATEM DAVID QUAE VOCATUR BETHLEHEM
EO QUOD ESSET DE DOMO ET FAMILIA DAVID
PROFITERI CUM MARIA DESPONSATA SIBI UXORE PRAEGNANTE
FACTUM EST AUTEM CUM ESSENT IBI IMPLERENTUR DIES UT PARERET
ET PEPERIT FILIUM SUUM PRIMOGENITUM
ET PANNIS EUM INVOLVIT ET REPOSUIT EUM IN PRAESEPIO
QUIA NON ERAT EIS LOCUS IN DIVERSORIO
ET PASTORES ERANT IN REGIONE EADEM VIGILANTES
ET CUSTODIENTES VIGILIAS NOCTIS SUPER GREGEM SUUM
ET ECCE ANGELUS DOMINI STETIT IUXTA ILLOS
ET CLARITAS DEI CIRCUMFULSIT EOS
ET TIMUERUNT TIMOREM MAGNUM
ET DIXIT ILLIS ANGELUS NOLITE TIMERE
ECCE ENIM EVANGELIZO VOBIS GAUDIUM MAGNUM
QUOD ERIT OMNI POPULO
QUIA NATUS EST VOBIS HODIE SALVATOR QUI EST CHRISTUS DOMINUS
IN CIVITATE DAVID
ET HOC VOBIS SIGNUM
INVENIETIS INFANTEM PANNIS INVOLUTUM ET POSITUM IN PRAESEPIO
ET SUBITO FACTA EST CUM ANGELO MULTITUDO MILITIAE CAELESTIS
LAUDANTIUM DEUM ET DICENTIUM
GLORIA IN ALTISSIMIS DEO
ET IN TERRA PAX HOMINIBUS BONAE VOLUNTATIS
ET FACTUM EST UT DISCESSERUNT ANGELI A EIS IN CAELUM
PASTORES LOQUEBANTUR AD INVICEM
TRANSEAMUS USQUE BETHLEHEM
ET VIDEAMUS HOC VERBUM QUOD FACTUM EST
QUOD FECIT DOMINUS ET OSTENDIT NOBIS
ET VENERUNT FESTINANTES
ET INVENERUNT MARIAM ET IOSEPH
ET INFANTEM POSITUM IN PRAESEPIO
VIDENTES AUTEM NOTAVERUNT DE VERBO QUOD DICTUM ERAT
ILLIS DE PUERO HOC
ET OMNES QUI AUDIERUNT MIRATI SUNT
ET DE HIS QUAE DICTA ERANT A PASTORIBUS
MARIA AUTEM CONSERVABAT OMNIA VERBA HAEC
CONFERENS IN CORDE SUO
ET REVERSI SUNT PASTORES GLORIFICANTES ET LAUDANTES DEUM
IN OMNIBUS QUAE AUDIERANT ET VIDERANT
SICUT DICTUM ERAT AD ILLOS
ET POSTQUAM CONSUMMATI SUNT DIES OCTO
UT CIRCUMCIDERETUR PUER
ET VOCATUM EST NOMEN EIUS IESUS
QUOD VOCATUM EST AB ANGELO PRIUSQUAM IN UTERO CONCIPERETUR
ET POSTQUAM IMPLETI SUNT DIES PURGATIONIS EIUS SECUNDUM LEGEM MOYSI
TULERUNT ILLUM IN HIERUSALEM
UT STATUERENT EUM DOMINO
SICUT SCRIPTUM EST IN LEGE DOMINI
QUIA OMNE MASCULINUM ADAPERIENS VULVAM SANCTUM DOMINO VOCABITUR
ET UT DARENT HOSTIAM SECUNDUM QUOD DICTUM EST IN LEGE DOMINI
PAR TURTURUM AUT DUO PULLI COLUMBARUM
ET ECCE HOMO ERAT IN HIERUSALEM
CUI NOMEN ERAT SIMEON
ET HOMO ISTE IUSTUS ET TIMORATUS
EXSPECTANS CONSOLATIONEM ISRAEL
ET SPIRITUS SANCTUS ERAT IN EO
ET RESPONSUM ACCEPERAT A SPIRITU SANCTO
NON VIDERE MORTEM NISI PRIUS VIDERET CHRISTUM DOMINI
ET VENIT IN SPIRITU IN TEMPLUM
ET CUM INDUCERENT PUERUM IESUM PARENTES EIUS
UT FACERENT SECUNDUM CONSUETUDINEM LEGIS PRO EO
ET IPSE ACCEPIT EUM IN ULNAS SUAS
ET BENEDIXIT DEUM ET DIXIT
NUNC DIMITTIS SERVUM TUUM DOMINE SECUNDUM VERBUM TUUM IN PACE
QUIA VIDERUNT OCULI MEI SALUTARE TUUM
QUOD PARASTI ANTE FACIEM OMNIUM POPULORUM
LUMEN AD REVELATIONEM GENTIUM
ET GLORIAM PLEBIS TUAE ISRAEL
ET ERAT PATER EIUS ET MATER MIRANTES SUPER HIS QUAE DICEBANTUR DE ILLO
ET BENEDIXIT ILLIS SIMEON
ET DIXIT AD MARIAM MATREM EIUS
ECCE POSITUS EST HIC IN RUINAM ET IN RESURRECTIONEM MULTORUM IN ISRAEL
ET IN SIGNUM CUI CONTRADICETUR
ET TUAM IPSIUS ANIMAM PERTRANSIBIT GLADIUS
UT REVELENTUR EX MULTIS CORDIBUS COGITATIONES
ET ERAT ANNA PROPHETISSA FILIA PHANUEL DE TRIBU ASER
HAEC PROVECTA ERAT IN DIEBUS MULTIS
ET VIXERAT CUM VIRO SUO ANNIS SEPTEM A VIRGINITATE SUA
ET HAEC VIDUA USQUE AD ANNOS OCTOGINTA QUATTUOR
QUAE NON DISCEDEBAT DE TEMPLO
IEIUNIIS ET OBSECRATIONIBUS SERVIENS NOCTE ET DIE
ET HAEC IPSA HORA SUPERVENIENS CONFITEBATUR DEO
ET LOQUEBATUR DE ILLO OMNIBUS QUI EXPECTABANT REDEMPTIONEM IN HIERUSALEM
ET UT CONSUMMAVERUNT OMNIA SECUNDUM LEGEM DOMINI
REVERSI SUNT IN GALILEAM IN CIVITATEM SUAM NAZARETH
PUER AUTEM CRESCEBAT ET CONFORTABATUR PLENUS SAPIENTIA
ET GRATIA DEI ERAT SUPER ILLUM
ET PROFICIEBAT SECUNDUM AETATEM SUAM
ET ASCENDEBANT PARENTES EIUS PER OMNES ANNOS IN HIERUSALEM
IN DIE SOLLEMNI PASCHAE
ET CUM FACTI ESSENT ANNORUM DUODECIM
ASCENDENTIBUS EIS SECUNDUM CONSUETUDINEM DIEI FESTI
ET CONSUMMATIS DIEBUS
CUM REDIRENT REMANSIT PUER IESUS IN HIERUSALEM
ET NON COGNOVERUNT PARENTES EIUS
PUTANTES AUTEM ILLUM ESSE IN COMITATU
VENERUNT ITER DIEI UNIUS
ET REQUIREBANT EUM INTER COGNATOS ET NOTOS
ET NON INVENIENTES REGRESSI SUNT IN HIERUSALEM
ET FACTUM EST POST TRIDUUM INVENERUNT ILLUM IN TEMPLO
SEDENTEM IN MEDIO DOCTORUM
AUDIENTEM ILLOS ET INTERROGANTEM EOS
ET STUPEBANT OMNES QUI EUM AUDIEBANT
SUPER PRUDENTIA ET RESPONSIS EIUS
ET VIDENTES EUM MIRATI SUNT
ET DIXIT MATER EIUS AD ILLUM
FILI QUID FECISTI NOBIS SIC
ECCE PATER TUUS ET EGO DOLENTES QUAEREBAMUS TE
ET AIT AD ILLOS QUID EST QUOD ME QUAEREBATIS
NESCIEBATIS QUIA IN HIS QUAE PATRIS MEI SUNT OPORTET ME ESSE
ET IPSI NON INTELLEXERUNT VERBUM QUOD LOCUTUS EST AD EOS
ET DESCENDIT CUM EIS ET VENIT NAZARETH
ET ERAT SUBDITUS ILLIS
ET MATER EIUS CONSERVABAT OMNIA VERBA HAEC IN CORDE SUO
ET IESUS PROFICIEBAT SAPIENTIA ET AETATE ET GRATIA APUD DEUM ET HOMINES
ANNO AUTEM QUINTODECIMO IMPERII TIBERII CAESARIS
PRINCIPANTE PONTIO PILATO IUDAEAM
ET TETRARCHA GALILEAE HERODE
PHILIPPO AUTEM FRATRE EIUS TETRARCHA ITURAEAE ET TRACHONITIDIS REGIONIS
ET LYSANIA ABILINAE TETRARCHA
SUB PRINCIPIBUS SACERDOTUM ANNA ET CAIPHA
FACTUM EST VERBUM DOMINI SUPER IOHANNEM ZACHARIAE FILIUM IN DESERTO
ET VENIT IN OMNEM REGIONEM IORDANIS
PRAEDICANS BAPTISMUM POENITENTIAE IN REMISSIONEM PECCATORUM
SICUT SCRIPTUM EST IN LIBRO SERMONUM ESAIAE PROPHETAE
VOX CLAMANTIS IN DESERTO
PARATE VIAM DOMINI
RECTAS FACITE SEMITAS EIUS
OMNIS VALLIS REPLEBITUR
ET OMNIS MONS ET COLLIS HUMILIABITUR
ET ERUNT PRAVA IN DIRECTA
ET ASPERA IN VIAS PLANAS
ET VIDEBIT OMNIS CARO SALUTARE DEI
DICEBAT ERGO TURBIS QUAE EGREDIEBATUR UT BAPTIZARETUR AB EO
GENIMINA VIPERARUM QUIS OSTENDIT VOBIS FUGERE A VENTURA IRA
FACITE ERGO FRUCTUS DIGNOS POENITENTIAE
ET NE COEPISTIS DICERE IN VOBIS METIPSIS PATREM HABEMUS ABRAHAM
DICO ENIM VOBIS QUIA POTENS EST DEUS DE LAPIDIBUS ISTIS SUSCITARE FILIOS ABRAHAE
JAM ENIM SECURIS AD RADICEM ARBORUM POSITA EST
OMNIS ERGO ARBOR QUAE NON FACIT FRUCTUM BONUM EXCIDETUR ET IN IGNEM MITTETUR
ET INTERROGABANT EUM TURBAE DICENTES QUID ERGO FACIEMUS
RESPONDENS AUTEM DICEBAT ILLIS QUI HABET DUAS TUNICAS DET NON HABENTI
ET QUI HABET ESCAS SIMILITER FACIAT
VENERUNT AUTEM ET PUBLICANI UT BAPTIZARENTUR
ET DIXERUNT AD EUM MAGISTER QUID FACIEMUS
AT ILLE DIXIT NIHIL AMPLIUS QUAM QUOD CONSTITUTUM EST VOBIS FACERE
INTERROGABANT AUTEM ET EUM MILITES DICENTES
ET NOS QUID FACIEMUS
ET AIT ILLIS NEMINEM CONCUTIATIS NEQUE CALUMNIAM FACIATIS
ET CONTENTI ESTOTE STIPENDIIS VESTRIS
EXISTIMANTE AUTEM POPULO ET COGITANTIBUS OMNIBUS IN CORDIBUS SUIS DE IOHANNE
NE FORTE IPSE ESSET CHRISTUS
RESPONDIT IOHANNES DICENS OMNIBUS
EGO QUIDEM VOS BAPTIZO IN AQUA
VENIET AUTEM FORTIOR ME
CUIUS NON SUM DIGNUS SOLVERE CORRIGIAM CALCEAMENTORUM EIUS
IPSE VOS BAPTIZABIT IN SPIRITU SANCTO ET IGNI
CUIUS VENTILABRUM IN MANU SUA
ET PURGABIT AREAM SUAM
ET CONGREGABIT FRUMENTUM IN HORREUM SUUM
PALEAS AUTEM COMBURET IGNI INEXTINGUIBILI
MULTA QUOQUE ET ALIA BONA EVANGELIZABAT POPULO
ET HERODES TETRARCHA CUM REPREHENDERETUR AB EO DE HERODIADE
UXORE PHILIPPI FRATRIS SUI
ET DE OMNIBUS MALIS QUAE FECIT HERODES
ADIECIT ET HOC SUPER OMNIA
ET CONCLUSIT IOHANNEM IN CARCERE
FACTUM EST AUTEM CUM BAPTIZARETUR OMNIS POPULUS
ET IESUS BAPTIZATUS ET ORANS APERTUM EST CAELUM
ET DESCENDIT SPIRITUS SANCTUS CORPORALI SPECIE SICUT COLUMBA IN IPSUM
ET VOX DE CAELO FACTA EST
TU ES FILIUS MEUS DILECTUS IN TE COMPLACUI MIHI
ET IPSE ERAT IESUS INCIPIENS QUASI ANNORUM TRIGINTA
UT PUTABATUR FILIUS IOSEPH
QUI FUIT HELI
QUI FUIT MATTHAT
QUI FUIT LEVI
QUI FUIT MELCHI
QUI FUIT IANNAE
QUI FUIT IOSEPH
QUI FUIT MATTATHIAE
QUI FUIT AMOS
QUI FUIT NAUM
QUI FUIT HESLI
QUI FUIT NAGGAE
QUI FUIT MAATH
QUI FUIT MATTATHIAE
QUI FUIT SEMEI
QUI FUIT IOSECH
QUI FUIT IODAE
QUI FUIT IOANNAE
QUI FUIT RESA
QUI FUIT ZOROBABEL
QUI FUIT SALATHIEL
QUI FUIT NERI
QUI FUIT MELCHI
QUI FUIT ADDI
QUI FUIT COSAM
QUI FUIT ELMODAM
QUI FUIT ER
QUI FUIT IESU
QUI FUIT ELIEZER
QUI FUIT IORIM
QUI FUIT MATTHAT
QUI FUIT LEVI
QUI FUIT SIMEON
QUI FUIT IUDAE
QUI FUIT IOSEPH
QUI FUIT IONAM
QUI FUIT ELIACIM
QUI FUIT MELEAE
QUI FUIT MENNAE
QUI FUIT MATTATHAE
QUI FUIT NATHAN
QUI FUIT DAVID
QUI FUIT IESSE
QUI FUIT OBED
QUI FUIT BOOZ
QUI FUIT SALMON
QUI FUIT NAASSON
QUI FUIT AMINADAB
QUI FUIT ADMIN
QUI FUIT ARNI
QUI FUIT EZROM
QUI FUIT PHARES
QUI FUIT IUDAE
QUI FUIT IACOB
QUI FUIT ISAAC
QUI FUIT ABRAHAM
QUI FUIT THARA
QUI FUIT NACHOR
QUI FUIT SARUG
QUI FUIT RAGAU
QUI FUIT PHALEC
QUI FUIT HEBER
QUI FUIT SALA
QUI FUIT CAINAN
QUI FUIT ARPHAXAD
QUI FUIT SEM
QUI FUIT NOE
QUI FUIT LAMECH
QUI FUIT MATHUSALA
QUI FUIT HENOCH
QUI FUIT IARED
QUI FUIT MALELEEL
QUI FUIT CAINAN
QUI FUIT ENOS
QUI FUIT SETH
QUI FUIT ADAM
QUI FUIT DEI
IESUS AUTEM PLENUS SPIRITU SANCTO REGRESSUS EST A IORDANE
ET AGEBATUR A SPIRITU IN DESERTUM
DIEBUS QUADRAGINTA ET TENTABATUR A DIABOLO
ET NON MANDUCAVIT QUICQUAM IN DIEBUS ILLIS
QUIBUS CONSUMMATIS ESURIIT
DIXIT AUTEM ILLI DIABOLUS SI FILIUS DEI ES
DIC LAPIDI HUIC UT PANIS FIAT
ET RESPONDIT ILLI IESUS
SCRIPTUM EST QUIA NON IN PANE SOLO VIVIT HOMO
SED IN OMNI VERBO DEI
ET DUCENS ILLUM IN ALTUM
OSTENDIT ILLI OMNIA REGNA ORBIS TERRAE IN MOMENTO TEMPORIS
ET AIT ILLI DIABOLUS
TIBI DABO POTESTATEM HANC UNIVERSAM
ET GLORIAM ILLORUM
QUIA MIHI TRADITA SUNT
ET CUI VOLO DO EAM
TU ERGO SI ADORAVERIS CORAM ME
ERUNT TUA OMNIA
ET RESPONDENS IESUS DIXIT ILLI
SCRIPTUM EST
DOMINUM DEUM TUUM ADORABIS
ET ILLI SOLI SERVIES
DUXIT AUTEM EUM IN HIERUSALEM
ET STATUIT SUPER PINNAM TEMPLI
ET DIXIT ILLI SI FILIUS DEI ES
MITTE TE HINC DEORSUM
SCRIPTUM EST ENIM QUIA ANGELIS SUIS MANDAVIT DE TE
UT CUSTODIANT TE
ET QUIA IN MANIBUS TOLLENT TE
NE FORTE OFFENDAS AD LAPIDEM PEDEM TUUM
ET RESPONDENS DIXIT ILLI IESUS
QUIA DICTUM EST
NON TENTABIS DOMINUM DEUM TUUM
ET CONSUMMATA OMNI TENTATIONE DIABOLUS
RECESSIT A EO USQUE AD TEMPUS
ET REGRESSUS IESUS IN VIRTUTE SPIRITUS IN GALILEAM
ET FAMA EXIIT PER UNIVERSAM REGIONEM DE ILLO
ET IPSE DOCEBAT IN SYNAGOGIS EORUM
ET MAGNIFICABATUR A OMNIBUS
ET VENIT NAZARETH UBI ERAT NUTRITUS
ET INTROIIT SECUNDUM CONSUETUDINEM SUAM DIE SABBATORUM IN SYNAGOGAM
ET SURREXIT LEGERE
ET TRADITUS EI EST LIBER ESAIAE PROPHETAE
ET UT REVOLVIT LIBRUM INVENIT LOCUM UBI SCRIPTUM ERAT
SPIRITUS DOMINI SUPER ME
PROPTER QUOD UNXIT ME
EVANGELIZARE PAUPERIBUS MISIT ME
SANARE CONTRITOS CORDE
PRAEDICARE CAPTIVIS REMISSIONEM
ET CAECIS VISUM
DIMITTERE CONFRACTOS IN REMISSIONEM
PRAEDICARE ANNUM DOMINI ACCEPTUM
ET DIEM RETRIBUTIONIS
ET CUM PLICUISSET LIBRUM REDDIDIT MINISTRO
ET SEDIT
ET OMNIUM IN SYNAGOGA OCULI ERANT INTENTI IN EUM
COEPIT AUTEM DICERE AD ILLOS
QUIA HODIE IMPLETA EST HAEC SCRIPTURA IN AURIBUS VESTRIS
ET OMNES TESTIMONIUM ILLI DABANT
ET MIRABANTUR IN VERBIS GRATIAE QUAE PROCEDEBANT DE ORE EIUS
ET DICEBANT NONNE HIC EST FILIUS IOSEPH
ET AIT ILLIS UTIQUE DICETIS MIHI HANC SIMILITUDINEM MEDICE CURA TE IPSUM
QUANTA AUDIVIMUS FACTA IN CAPHARNAUM FAC ET HIC IN PATRIA TUA
AMEN AUTEM DICO VOBIS QUIA NEMO PROPHETA ACCEPTUS EST IN PATRIA SUA
IN VERITATE AUTEM DICO VOBIS MULTAE VIDUAE ERANT IN DIEBUS HELIAE IN ISRAEL
QUANDO CLAUSUM EST CAELUM ANNIS TRIBUS ET MENSIBUS SEX
CUM FACTA ESSET FAMES MAGNA IN UNIVERSA TERRA
ET AD NULLAM ILLARUM MISSUS EST HELIAS NISI IN SAREPTA SIDONIAE AD MULIEREM VIDUAM
ET MULTI LEPROSI ERANT IN ISRAEL SUB ELISAEO PROPHETA
ET NEMO EORUM MUNDATUS EST NISI NAAMAN SYRUS
ET REPLETI SUNT OMNES IRA IN SYNAGOGA HAEC AUDIENTES
ET SURREXERUNT EJECERUNTQUE EUM EXTRA CIVITATEM
ET DUXERUNT EUM USQUE AD SUPERCILIUM MONTIS SUPER QUEM CIVITAS ILLORUM AEDIFICATA ERAT
UT PRAECIPITARENT EUM
IPSE AUTEM TRANSIENS PER MEDIUM ILLORUM IBAT
ET DESCENDIT IN CAPHARNAUM CIVITATEM GALILEAE
ET ERAT DOCENS EOS IN SABBATIS
ET STUPEBANT SUPER DOCTRINA EIUS
QUIA IN POTESTATE ERAT SERMO EIUS
ET IN SYNAGOGA ERAT HOMO HABENS SPIRITUM DAEMONII IMMUNDI
ET EXCLAMAVIT VOCE MAGNA
SINE QUID NOBIS ET TIBI IESU NAZARENE
VENISTI PERDERE NOS
SCIO TE QUI SIS SANCTUS DEI
ET INCREPAVIT ILLUM IESUS DICENS
OBMUTESCE ET EXI AB EO
ET CUM MISISSET EUM DAEMONIUM IN MEDIUM
EXIIT AB EO NIHIL NOCENS ILLI
ET FACTUS EST PAVOR IN OMNES
ET COLLOQUEBANTUR AD INVICEM DICENTES
QUAE EST HAEC QUIA IN POTESTATE ET VIRTUTE IMPERAT SPIRITIBUS IMMUNDIS
ET EXEUNT
ET DIVULGABATUR FAMA DE ILLO IN OMNEM LOCUM REGIONIS
SURGENTES AUTEM DE SYNAGOGA INTROIERUNT IN DOMUM SIMONIS
SOCRUS AUTEM SIMONIS TENEBATUR MAGNIS FEBRIBUS
ET ROGAVERUNT EUM PRO ILLA
ET STANS SUPER ILLAM IMPERAVIT FEBRI
ET DIMISIT ILLAM
ET CONTINUO SURGENS MINISTRABAT EIS
OCCIDENTE AUTEM SOLE OMNES QUI HABEBANT INFIRMOS
LANGUORIBUS VARIIS DUCEBANT EOS AD EUM
AT ILLE SINGULIS MANUS IMPONENS CURABAT EOS
EXIEBANT AUTEM DAEMONIA A MULTIS CLAMANTIA ET DICENTIA
QUIA TU ES FILIUS DEI
ET INCREPANS NON SINEBAT EA LOQUI
QUIA SCIEBANT IPSUM ESSE CHRISTUM
FACTO AUTEM DIE EXIENS IBAT IN DESERTUM LOCUM
ET TURBAE REQUIREBANT EUM
ET VENERUNT USQUE AD IPSUM
ET DETINEBANT EUM NE DISCEDERET A SE
QUI ET DIXIT AD ILLOS
QUIA ET ALIIS CIVITATIBUS OPORTET ME EVANGELIZARE REGNUM DEI
QUIA IDEO MISSUS SUM
ET ERAT PRAEDICANS IN SYNAGOGIS GALILEAE
FACTUM EST AUTEM CUM TURBAE IRRUERENT IN EUM
ET AUDIRENT VERBUM DEI
ET IPSE STABAT SECUS STAGNUM GENESARET
ET VIDIT DUAS NAVES STANTES SECUS STAGNUM
PISCATORES AUTEM DESCENDERANT DE EIS
ET LAVABANT RETIA
ASCENDENS AUTEM IN UNAM NAVEM QUAE ERAT SIMONIS
ROGAVIT EUM A TERRA REDUCERE PUSILLUM
ET SEDENS DE NAVICULA DOCEBAT TURBAS
UT AUTEM CESSAVIT LOQUI
DIXIT AD SIMONEM
DUC IN ALTUM
ET LAXATE RETIA VESTRA IN CAPTURAM
ET RESPONDENS SIMON DIXIT ILLI
PRAECEPTOR PER TOTAM NOCTEM LABORANTES NIHIL CEPIMUS
IN VERBO AUTEM TUO LAXABO RETE
ET CUM HOC FECISSENT CONCLUSERUNT PISCIUM COPIAM MULTAM
RUPEBATUR AUTEM RETE EORUM
ET ANNUERUNT SOCIIS QUI ERANT IN ALTERA NAVI
UT VENIENTES ADIUVARENT EOS
ET VENERUNT ET IMPLEVERUNT AMBAS NAVES
ITA UT PENE MERGERENTUR
QUOD CUM VIDISSET SIMON PETRUS PROCIDIT AD GENUA IESU
DICENS EXI A ME QUIA HOMO PECCATOR SUM DOMINE
STUPOR ENIM CIRCUMDEDERAT EUM
ET OMNES QUI CUM ILLO ERANT
IN CAPTURA PISCIUM QUAM CEPERANT
SIMILITER AUTEM IACOBUM ET IOANNEM FILIOS ZEBEDAEI
QUI ERANT SOCII SIMONIS
ET AIT AD SIMONEM IESUS NOLI TIMERE
EX HOC IAM HOMINES ERIS CAPIENS
ET SUBDUCTIS AD TERRAM NAVIBUS
RELICTIS OMNIBUS SECUTI SUNT EUM
ET FACTUM EST CUM ESSET IN UNA CIVITATUM
ET ECCE VIR PLENUS LEPRA
ET VIDENS IESUM PROCIDIT IN FACIEM
ROGANSQUE EUM DICENS
DOMINE SI VIS POTES ME MUNDARE
ET EXTENDENS MANUM TETIGIT EUM DICENS
VOLO MUNDARE
ET CONTINUO LEPRA DISCESSIT AB EO
ET IPSE PRAECEPIT ILLI UT NEMINI DICERET
SED ITE OSTENDE TE SACERDOTI
ET OFFERE PRO EMUNDATIONE TUA SICUT PRAECEPIT MOYSES
IN TESTIMONIUM ILLIS
PERTRANSIBAT AUTEM MAGIS SERMO DE ILLO
ET CONVENIEBANT TURBAE MULTAE UT AUDIRENT ET CURARENTUR AB INFIRMITATIBUS SUIS
IPSE AUTEM SECESSIT IN DESERTUM ET ORABAT
ET FACTUM EST IN UNA DIERUM
ET ILLE ERAT DOCENS
ET ERANT PHARISAEI SEDENTES ET LEGIS DOCTORES
QUI VENERANT EX OMNI CASTELLO GALILEAE ET IUDAEAE ET HIERUSALEM
ET VIRTUS DOMINI ERAT AD SANANDUM EOS
ET ECCE VIRI PORTANTES IN LECTULO HOMINEM QUI ERAT PARALYTICUS
ET QUAEREBANT EUM INFERRE ET PONERE ANTE EUM
ET NON INVENIENTES QUA PARTE ILLUM INFERRENT PRAE TURBA
ASCENDENTES SUPER TECTUM PER TEGULAS DEMISERUNT EUM CUM LECTULO
IN MEDIUM ANTE IESUM
QUEM VIDENS FIDEM ILLORUM DIXIT
HOMO TIBI DIMITTUNTUR PECCATA TUA
ET COEPERUNT COGITARE SCRIBAE ET PHARISAEI DICENTES
QUIS EST HIC QUI LOQUITUR BLASPHEMIAS
QUIS POTEST DIMITTERE PECCATA NISI SOLUS DEUS
ET CUM COGNOVISSET IESUS COGITATIONES EORUM
RESPONDENS DIXIT AD ILLOS
QUID COGITATIS IN CORDIBUS VESTRIS
QUID EST FACILIUS DICERE DIMITTUNTUR TIBI PECCATA TUA
AN DICERE SURGE ET AMBULA
UT AUTEM SCIATIS QUIA FILIUS HOMINIS HABET POTESTATEM IN TERRA DIMITTENDI PECCATA
DIXIT PARALYTICO
TIBI DICO SURGE
TOLLE LECTULUM TUUM ET VADE IN DOMUM TUAM
ET CONTINUO SURGENS CORAM EIS
TULIT LECTULUM IN QUO JACEBAT
ET ABIIT IN DOMUM SUAM MAGNIFICANS DEUM
ET STUPOR APPREHENDIT OMNES
ET MAGNIFICABANT DEUM
ET REPLETI SUNT TIMORE DICENTES
QUIA VIDIMUS MIRABILIA HODIE
POST HAEC EXIIT ET VIDIT PUBLICANUM NOMINE LEVI
SEDENTEM AD TELONIUM
ET AIT ILLI SEQUERE ME
ET RELICTIS OMNIBUS SURGENS SECUTUS EST EUM
ET FECIT ILLI CONVIVIUM MAGNUM LEVI IN DOMO SUA
ET ERAT TURBA MULTA PUBLICANORUM ET ALIORUM QUI CUM ILLIS ERANT DISCUMBENTES
ET MURMURABANT PHARISAEI ET SCRIBAE EORUM DICENTES
QUARE CUM PU

posterity, did not care to preserve. Cynewulf appears to have been a minstrel all his life, and it is not probable that his gay youth was devoted to the composition or recital of poems like his *Crist*. If, however, he and his companions chanted the deeds of heroes in the fashion of the singer of Beowulf, their lays have perished for want of a penman. Some specimens of what may be termed domestic poetry alone remain to attest that the books of nature and humanity were not entirely neglected for the tomes of ecclesiastical legend.

Elegiac poems

The beginnings of a school of poetry which might have become great, and perhaps did actually attain a greatness which we are unable to estimate in the wreck of vernacular secular literature, appear in a few elegiac poems of the period, *The Ruin*, *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Husband's Message*, *The Wife's Complaint*. These have an interest beyond their intrinsic poetical merit as proofs that two of the most distinctive characteristics of English poetry have been present with it from the very first—thoughtful melancholy and the love of nature. *The Ruin*, a meditation upon the relics of some desolate Roman city, which the allusions to the hot springs almost proves to have been Bath, reaches out a hand to Caius Marius on one side and to the author of *Love among the Ruins* on the other:—

> Brilliant were the burg-steads, burn-fed houses many;
> High the heap of hornéd gables, of the host a mickle sound,
> Many were the mead-halls, full of mirth of men,
> Till the strong-willed Wyrd whirled all that to change.
> In a slaughter wide they fell, woeful days of bale came on,
> Famine-death fortook fortitude from men;
> All their battle-bulwarks bare foundations were!
> Crumbled is the castle-keep; these have cringed to earth
> Who set up again the shrines. So the halls are dreary,
> And this courtyard's wide expanse. From the raftered woodwork
> See, the roof has shed its tiles. To ruin sank the market-place,
> Broken up to barrows; many a brave man there,
> Glad of yore and gold-bright, gloriously adorned,
> Hot with wine and haughty, in war-harness shone;—
> Saw upon his silver, on set gems and treasure,
> On his welfare and his wealth, on his winsome jewels,
> On this brightsome burg of a broad dominion!
> There the stone-courts stood; hotly surged the stream,
> With a widening whirling; and a wall enclosed it all
> With its bosom bright. There the baths were set
> Hot within their heart; fit [for health] it was!

A similar note is struck in *The Wanderer*, which indeed appears to plagiarise from *The Ruin*. Melancholy and love of nature are beautifully combined in a passage in *The Husband's (or Lover's) Complaint*:—

> Soon as ever thou shalt listen on the edges of the cliff
> To the cuckoo in the copse-wood, chanting of his sorrow,
> Then begin to seek the sea, where the sea-mew is at home;
> Sit thee in the sea-bark, so that to the southward
> Thou mayest light upon thy lover, o'er the ocean pathways
> Where thy Lord with longing looks and waits for thee.

More remarkable still is the passion for the sea, prophetic of the future naval glory of the race. In the *Seafarer*, the old mariner, after a most discouraging description of the hardships he has himself undergone in a maritime life :—

> All the glee I got me was the gannet's scream,
> And the swoughing of the seal, 'stead of mirth of men,

comes back to acknowledge that

> Yes, so haughty of his heart is no hero on the earth,
> Nor so good in all his giving, nor so generous in youth,
> That he has not always yearning unto his seafaring.
> To whatever work his Lord may have will to make for him.
> For the harp he has no heart, nor for having of the rings,
> Nor in woman is his weal, in the world he's no delight,
> Nor in anything whatever save the tossing of the waves,
> O for ever he has longing who is urged towards the sea.

Not other is the note of this old poet hymning the spell of the sea than that of the modern when he sings the yearning for ideal beauty :—

> Wer die Schönheit angeschaut mit Augen
> Ist dem Tode schon anheimgegeben,
> Wird für keinen Dienst auf Erden taugen,
> Und doch wird er vor dem Tode beben.
> Wer die Schönheit angeschaut mit Augen.

Such poetry undoubtedly springs from maritime Northumbria, and Mr. Stopford Brooke's theory of its origin is probably correct: "I conjecture that in the first twenty or thirty years of the eighth century there were poets living in the courts of the princes and earls of Northumbria, who were Bohemian enough, if I may be permitted that term, not to care for anything but poetry; to whom Christianity was a good thing, but over whom it had no special hold; who were half pagan at heart while Christian in name; and who resembled, but only in the general temper of their minds, the class of literary men whom the Renaissance made in Florence and Rome. It was this class who wrote, I think, these elegies, and it is probable that there were a great many more poems of this kind."

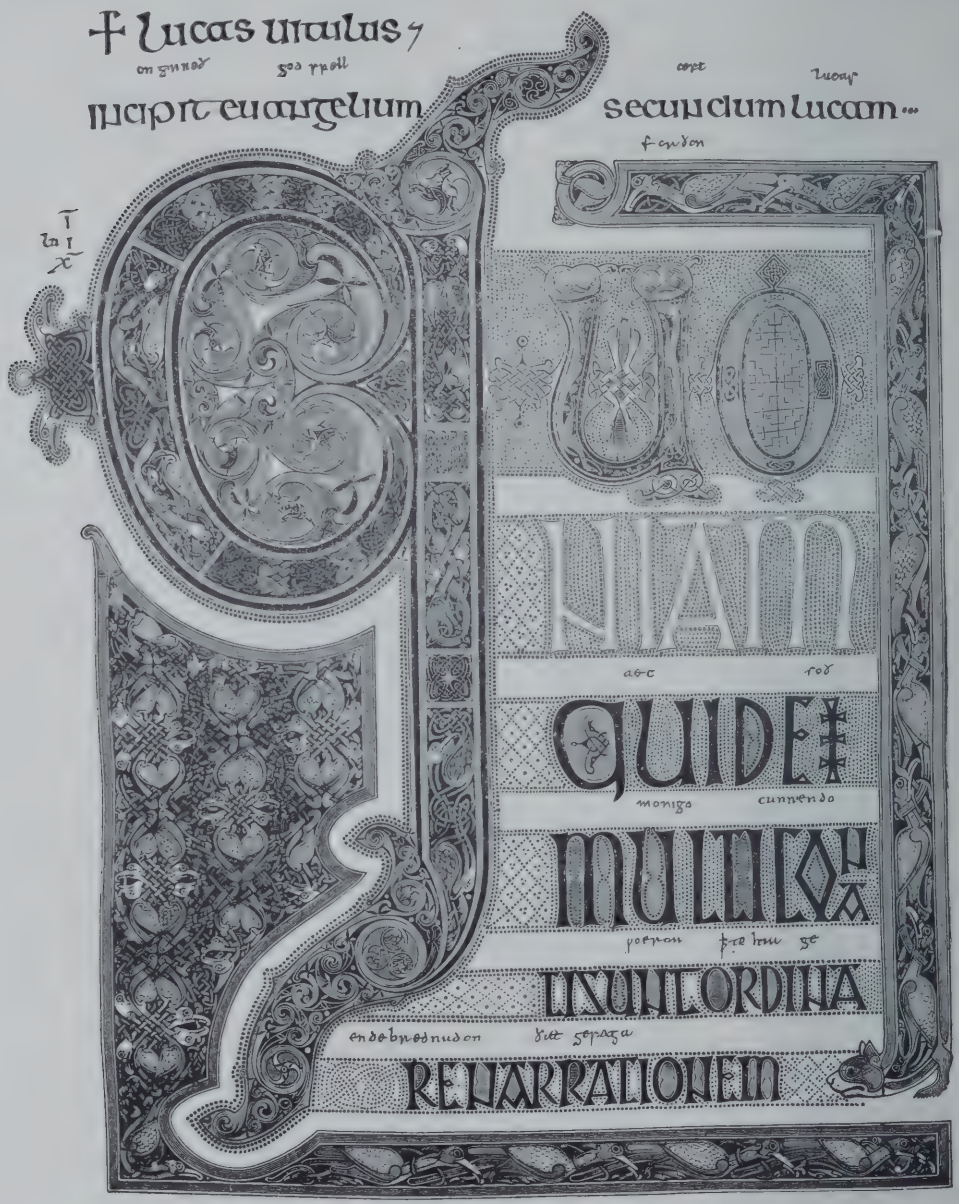
Latin literature in Anglo-Saxon England

The habit of mind thus attributed to these poets would have aided them to excel in Latin composition; but, save for the borrowings of ecclesiastical poets from Latin hymns, which affect the substance rather than the form of their compositions, and the paraphrase of the *Phœnix* of Lactantius attributed to Cynewulf, there is little trace of classical influence upon the Anglo-Saxon verse of the age. In prose, on the other hand, Anglo-Saxon was almost swallowed up by Latin. The Latin literature of England does not, strictly speaking, fall within our province; but two Latin authors, at least, are too conspicuous as intellectual lights of the time to be omitted from a survey of English literary history.

It was one of the chief benefits conferred by Christianity upon

Monastic education. Aldhelm

England to have brought schools into the land. There had previously been no organised system for imparting knowledge, every man picked



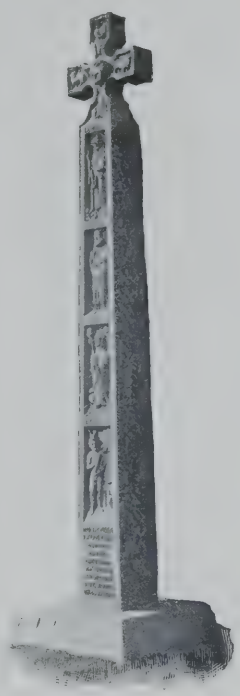
Beginning of St. Luke's Gospel

From the Lindisfarne Gospel-book in the British Museum

Beda Alcuin

up what he could where he could. Christianity brought in a class of priests and coenobites, who by the very condition of their existence were bound to know something, and for whose education it was necessary to make some sort of provision. Every monastery thus became a school,

with more or less of a library appended, and in some cases a centre for the multiplication of books and the study of calligraphy. When (A.D. 668) Theodore came over from Rome as archbishop, he established schools at Canterbury, which imparted not only religious but secular knowledge. There **Aldhelm, Abbot of Malmesbury,** and afterwards Bishop of Sherborne, received his education, and qualified himself to write Latin books which, though of little value in our day, gained him the fame of extensive learning in that darkest hour of Europe's intellectual night. "The leader of that noble series of English scholars who represent the first endeavouring stage of recovery after the great eclipse of European culture" (Earle). The vernacular poems attributed to him by Alfred, which he is said to have recited in public to allure men to listen to his preaching, are unfortunately lost. A more famous author and ecclesiastic, **Beda the Venerable,** owed his erudition to the library with which his tutor, Benedict Biscop, had enriched the monastery of Jarrow, where Beda's blameless and laborious life was chiefly spent. That this library, to collect which Benedict had thrice travelled to Rome, must have been extensive is apparent from the numerous quotations from obscure writers made in Beda's works: and his own writings contributed not a little to increase it. So active was his pen that he himself enumerates thirty-seven distinct books of his own, besides his great ecclesiastical history. Whether as a commentator on Scripture, or as a retailer of general information, Beda is little more than a compiler; his life of St. Cuthbert convicts him of gross credulity; of his history much might be said if our theme were Anglo-Latin literature. Though not an English author, Beda stands forth as a great English man of letters; more decisively, perhaps, the first scholar of his day than any one has been after him. He probably stood alone among his countrymen for his knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, and the extent of his acquaintance with the Latin classics. Writing, however, entirely in Latin, except for a translation of the Gospel of St. John left unfinished and unfortunately lost, he could effect nothing for the English language, and the first period of Anglo-Saxon literature closed without any noticeable progress towards the formation of a school of prose composition. One man who might perhaps have promoted it, if he had remained in England, was drawn away by the offers of Charlemagne to spread the light of education in France. By inviting (782) **Alcuin,** head of the great ecclesiastical school at York, to organise instruction in his own dominions, Charlemagne deprived



The Caedmon Cross at Whitby Abbey

England of a great scholar, but it is very doubtful whether the Latin teacher would ever have become the English author. Alcuin, as teacher and writer, did much for the instruction of the clergy both at home and abroad, and cannot have been wholly without influence on the laity; but the idea that Latin letters should be made accessible to the Saxon in his own language, and thus become the nucleus of a vernacular literature, was reserved for a greater than Alcuin—King Alfred.

CHAPTER II

FROM THE DANE TO THE NORMAN

850–1066

Latin influence on Anglo-Saxon literature

EVERY nation, with but two exceptions — and these placed at opposite poles of the world of culture—has been indebted to its neighbours or its predecessors for the development and refinement of its literature. The literature even of India intimates acquaintance with Greek examples; and the only two from which similar indications are absent, or where at least they are unimportant, are the strongly contrasted literatures of Greece and China. The indigenous literature of China remained long exempt from all possibility of foreign influence, for the simple reason that no people known to the Chinese possessed any literary faculty, or, consequently, any power of modifying the intellectual productions of their neighbours: and when at length the Chinese came into contact with civilisations other than their own, prescription and self-esteem had hardened the naturally stolid genius of the nation into absolute impenetrability by extraneous influence. With the Greeks it was far otherwise, no people could be intellectually more flexible and sensitive, and yet, while borrowing freely in every other department, their literature remained entirely their own. Nothing can convey a higher idea of the unique gifts of this marvellous race. Were modern literatures restricted to their strictly national elements little indeed would remain of any of them. Hardly any nation could have stood in more need than the Anglo-Saxons of intellectual regeneration by the inoculation of imported culture. The Anglo-Saxon's distinguishing virtue was solidity, his distinguishing vice sluggishness. The type of his unimproved condition is that so admirably embodied by Sir Walter Scott in Athelstan the Unready, brave and sturdy, bulky in thew and sinew, a doughty champion if he can once be got into fighting trim, but so stolid and unimpressionable as to be made captive ere he has even thought of drawing his sword. We are uncomfortably reminded every day how nearly this description still answers to our national character, while the originality and occasional extravagance of our literature for the last four centuries attest how profoundly, in spite of persistent survivals, this character has been modified.

As we have seen, animosities of race and memories of conflict deprived the Anglo-Saxons of the vivifying influence which their Celtic neighbours

might otherwise have exerted upon their literature, and threw them back upon their Latin instructors and the pupils trained by these in the monasteries. Some of the monasteries, especially Lindisfarne and York, were genuine seats of learning. The importance of York in the eighth century may be gathered from the description of its pupil and professor Alcuin, and still more from the renown he had gained in it which induced Charlemagne to summon him to become one of the chief ministers of

Ruins of Lindisfarne Abbey

culture in France. The monastic course of instruction, while serviceable to learning, could do little to aid vernacular studies or develop any germs of literary genius which it might find existing, nor could it implant any of its own. Anglo-Saxon was as yet in too rude a condition to assimilate Latin models, and Latin was the only language in which the literary class, apart from the makers of minstrelsy, cared to express itself. The overwhelming majority of this class being clerical, its aims were chiefly didactic, and it probably occurred to few that the vernacular speech could be applied to any other purpose than that of instructing the ordinary man in his duty by means of homilies to be read to him, not by him. Although Mercia and Wessex had successively held the primacy among Anglo-Saxon states,

although the speech of Wessex was the most developed among Anglo-Saxon dialects, the native language and literature at the beginning of the ninth century still remain torpid for want of an impulse, and the force that then arrived to break up the stolidity of Anglo-Saxon existence threatened to sweep away civilisation and national life along with it.

Danish invasions

The epic of *Beowulf* has already acquainted us with Scandinavian monarchs in the south of Sweden in the sixth century, whose spirit of enterprise carried their marauding expeditions as far as Friesland. From the early part of the sixth until near the end of the eighth century a pause takes place; we hear little of Scandinavian piracies, and the Anglo-Saxons are left to fight their battles among themselves, although Scandinavian auxiliaries would have been welcome to the weaker party, and would have been afforded great opportunities for conquest at the expense of both. In 787, however, a plundering Danish expedition landed in Dorsetshire; in 793 Lindisfarne Abbey, the Mecca of Northumbria, was burned; and by 830 the Scandinavian chieftains, probably impelled by the pressure of population, had organised their strength for systematic naval forays. They especially directed their attacks against Northumbria, the part of the island nearest their own habitations, and against the south-west, where the remnant of the ancient British population, still independent, or imperfectly subdued, was ready to side with them. The political events of the early part of the century should have augmented the Anglo-Saxon power of resistance; for Egbert, King of Wessex, had gradually pushed his conquests to the point of gaining recognition as "overlord" of the entire English part of the island. But his authority was rather nominal than real, there was little actual cohesion among his subjects, and the Danes, to employ the collective appellation commonly bestowed upon all Scandinavian invaders, though frequently defeated, were still more frequently victorious. And whereas the defeats they might sustain merely preluded their reappearance in some other quarter, every victory was signalised by the destruction, if not of a town or city, at least of a group of churches or monasteries, the sole asylums of literature and culture in a rude age. The influence of a milder religion, unaccompanied as yet by any sentiment of chivalry, had enfeebled the national vigour, not so much from any real incompatibility between the precepts of religion and the duty of self-defence, as by the gradual and almost imperceptible transformation of a military into a monastic ideal of life. The Saxons fought bravely in particular instances, but never achieved the universal national uprising which could alone have delivered them from their enemy. The valour of the Danes, on the other hand, amounted to absolute contempt for death: and their strength and numbers may be estimated by the stupendous rampart of their raising which yet draws a semicircle around Flamborough Head. The Danish origin of this mighty work has been questioned, but without reason; the builders, whoever they were, could have had no other objects than those of protecting their booty and their vessels drawn up, as the

fishermen's barks are drawn up at this day, on the pebbly landing-places, and of acquiring a position from which they could sally forth against the surrounding country. Its construction may be probably connected with the great expedition of 867, in which York was taken and sacked, the Northumbrian army routed, and both the rival kings of Northumbria, united by the common peril, were slain in the same battle.

Ruin of literature and learning

Hatred of Christianity may have contributed to direct the attacks of the Danes against monasteries, but they were also impelled by a more powerful motive, the place which, in a land destitute of fortified castles, monasteries filled as refuges of the helpless part of the population, and storehouses of their wealth. This double purpose was undoubtedly served by the round towers of Ireland, a country equally devastated by Danish incursions. These strongholds were evidently constructed with the view of allowing the enemy the fewest possible points of attack, the monasteries, not erected with prevision of a chronic state of warfare, having offered many. The Saxons do not seem to have often followed the example of the Irish in this respect, and their monasteries, though stoutly defended, everywhere became the prey of the invader. To appreciate the disastrous effect upon literature, it must be remembered that in those days the monastery was the college, and was not unfrequently, as at York, connected with a large teaching institution, intended for priests as well as monks, and available in some measure for inquisitive laymen. If the young Anglo-Saxon could not obtain knowledge there, he could obtain it nowhere, unless he emigrated; his parents' house had neither books nor teachers, and the tools of self-education were debarred. The youth who might have become a fair scholar for his time grew up devoid of knowledge, and when the time came when he should have taught others, he had nothing to impart. All literary culture might thus very conceivably die out in a generation. One faint link with the world of learning remained; the consolations of religion could not be foregone; and their efficacy was not thought to depend upon the intelligence either of teacher or hearer. The preacher, if able to read, might recite what he could not understand, if unable he might be taught to repeat it by rote to equal purpose. Priests, however, learned or unlearned, there must be. This explains the crass ignorance in which Alfred found his clergy—a condition not discreditable to them since they could not avert it; and even honourable, in so far as it attests their fortitude in remaining at their posts at a period of universal desolation.

It certainly seemed as though the ninth century in England were destined to repeat the history of the fifth. In the fifth century Britain had been inhabited by a civilised people, whose upper classes, at all events, were not unacquainted with literature. But the sinews of the nation were relaxed by soft living, the hardy warriors who had for centuries relieved them from the burden of military service were withdrawn to contend with barbarians nearer home; fierce enemies, until now held in check, pressed heavily

upon them; and whether, deeming to cast out Satan by Satan, they really invoked the aid of another barbarous nation, or whether the latter were attracted by their weakness, they found themselves in presence not merely of conquerors but of exterminators. For a time the old civilisation seemed to have totally disappeared; the inhabitants of the land spoke a new language, and the ideal of literature, could such be said to exist, was something entirely different from the old. As, however, foreign influences began to creep in, something analogous to the old state of things seemed about to return. A Latin civilisation appeared to be becoming superimposed upon a Teutonic, as formerly upon a Celtic substratum; the blood and the language of the intruding race continued to differ from those of the race expelled, but the ideals of life and conduct were becoming the same, and those ideals threatened to do the new people the same service and disservice as they had done the old. That nothing might be wanting to the parallel, a people comparatively barbarous, at first mere marauders attracted by the hope of plunder, were finding out the goodness of the land and threatening to form permanent settlements and destroy or expel, not absorb, the Saxons, precisely as those had destroyed or expelled the Britons. The result must have been among other things the destruction of Anglo-Saxon speech and letters, and the provision of an entirely dissimilar groundwork for the literary culture which, under any circumstances, must have sooner or later established itself in Britain.

Scandinavian influences

It is a curious consideration that English literature actually did receive a strong Scandinavian influence, but through a psychical, not a philological channel. The Northmen came again and actually prevailed. But in the interim a change had come over the invaders themselves. Settled in France for several generations, they had disused their original tongue, and the language they had adopted was saturated with the Latin influence which in the ninth century they would have extirpated. Instead of the adversaries of a higher culture they had become its promoters. Had the Northmen's conquest been effected in the days of Alfred, our language at this day would have resembled Danish, both by philological affinity and by the absence of any noticeable Latin element: and English literature must have been very different from what it is now. While, however, the Scandinavian element, at first repulsed, afterwards absorbed, failed to exert any special influence on British literature, the Scandinavian mind became a most important factor. The Northmen had not laid aside their nationality with their language, and the Conquest, notwithstanding its partial Latinisation of the English speech, invigorated instead of impairing the Teutonic elements of character which it found in possession. If we sought for the persons who have exercised the most decisive influence upon our literature, we might find them in two of our kings, William the Conqueror and Alfred, but for whose action at critical periods of our history Latin and its derivatives would have remained mere exotics, instead of vital constituents of our tongue. Neither had this aim consciously before him. William never

knew that he was infusing a new element into English, and never dreamed of giving it a new lease of life; he would much sooner have obliterated it. If, as stated, he endeavoured to learn it, he was solely actuated by political considerations. If Alfred became the first Anglo-Saxon author of his day, his aim was not the preservation of the language, but the instruction of the people who spoke it. Alike, nevertheless, by his achievements in this comparatively limited department, and from the more important circumstance that the preservation of Anglo-Saxon as the basis of British speech is mainly due to him, he deserves the fullest notice at the hands of the literary historian.

Life of Alfred the Great

It is an interesting circumstance that our chief authority for the life of the great Anglo-Saxon monarch should be not a Saxon but a Celt. Asser, Bishop of Sherborne, was a monk of St. David's, and was invited by Alfred to his court along with other learned men. Of these, and of Asser himself, and his biography of his royal patron down to the year 887, we shall find other opportunities of speaking. For the present it is enough to say that, though interpolated with legendary matter, separable with no great difficulty from the genuine original, his record appears to be authentic. At the very beginning of the story, however, we are confronted by a chronological difficulty. **Alfred,** the fifth and youngest son of Ethelwulf, King of Wessex, is said by Asser to have been born in 849. His eldest brother, Ethelstan, however, was of an age to be invested with the government of the sub-kingdom of Kent upon the succession of his father to the kingdom of Wessex in 839; and the third son, Ethelbald, fought the Danes along with his father in the great battle of Ockley in 851, when Alfred would have been only two years old. It seems unlikely that there could have been such an interval between the birth of Alfred and those of his brothers, and the difficulty is increased when we read that Alfred was sent to Rome in 853. It is scarcely probable that so young a child would have been exposed to the risks of what was then a toilsome and dangerous journey. If we may put Alfred's birth eight or nine years back the chronological difficulties will be removed, and it will become easy to understand how the youthful promise which Alfred must have given may have inspired his father with the idea of sending him for a time to reside at the capital of Western Christendom. The step becomes more intelligible when viewed in connection with the character of Ethelwulf, the dominant note of which was a deep feeling of religion. Ethelwulf seems, indeed, to have impersonated those superstitious and quietist tendencies of the Anglo-Saxon character which so greatly impaired the national strength in conflict with the fierce Northmen, but which on the other hand indicated a refinement of nature upon which the moral and intellectual promise of his youngest son would

Coin of Alfred the Great

not be lost. History, however, and no doubt with good reason, ascribes a still stronger influence upon Alfred's development to his mother Osburga. The anecdotes of his youth handed down may belong to the domain of legend, but if so this is the legend which has its basis in truth, and only comes into being to recompense posterity for the loss of truth through the injury of time. It may be added that Asser's story of Osburga having shown her son a manuscript with a beautifully illuminated initial letter, and promised it to him on condition of his learning to read it, if authentic, we

Jewel of Alfred the Great

might almost say, if generally believed, proves that Alfred's birth must have occurred some years before 849. Historians have perceived that it could not have taken place in Alfred's infancy, between his birth in 849 and his visit to Rome in 853, and as upon his return to England his father had another wife, they have supposed that Osburga was repudiated by her husband, and that the incident occurred while she lived in retirement after her dethronement. Such a transaction would not have been devoid of precedent; Charlemagne himself had divorced his first wife, Desiderata, but she had lived with him only a year, and he had no children by her; and the proceeding appears inconsistent with the religious character of King Ethelwulf, and with the Pope's special patronage of him and his legitimate son, and the scandal and contention it must have excited would not have

escaped the notice of history. The new queen, moreover, was the daughter of Charles the Bald, King of the Franks, who would hardly have allowed her to occupy so invidious a position as the consort of a sovereign whose legitimate wife was still alive. Some clue may be afforded to the problem of Alfred's birth-year by the curious fact that in Camden's edition of Asser 855 is stated to be his eleventh year, which is inconsistent with all the rest of the chronology. It looks very much as though a variant chronology existed in some MS., and this conjecture is favoured by the circumstance that Asser, whose history of Alfred ends in 887, speaks of him as in his forty-fifth year, which would precisely agree with his birth in 843.

Alfred's education

The date of Alfred's birth is no idle question, for his age at the period of his visit to Rome has an important bearing on his after history. It continued from 853 to 856. The influence of the Eternal City, and all else that a prolonged visit to the continent implied, must have been slight upon a child between four and seven years of age, compared with that which it might exert upon a boy between ten and thirteen. In the former case Alfred could only bring back impressions of childish wonder and curiosity, in the latter his stay would have been fertile in knowledge and instruction absorbed by one of the most receptive of human minds, and in external impressions registered and elaborated by one of the most intelligent. Rome indeed no less than other cities of Western Europe lay immersed in barbarism; yet in comparison with Alfred's own country its intellectual condition must have been as light to darkness. If the abstract love of humane studies was insufficient to keep these alive, ecclesiastical and political interests compelled their maintenance at as high a standard as the circumstances of the age allowed. There must have been much better schools than then possible in England, distracted by Danish invasions; and a boy between ten and thirteen would be just at the age when their teaching would be most helpful. The indirect influences, nevertheless, would be more potent and valuable than any direct instruction. We can but feebly imagine the transition from the incivility of the West Saxon capital to the spiritual metropolis of Latin Christendom, with the actuality of a spiritual empire and the memories and traditions of a secular, its monuments of the past, more numerous and imposing than now, the undimmed gorgeousness of its recent works in mosaic and incrusted metal, the art-ideal of their time, its embassies and its pilgrims, the constant coming and going of men from all lands bound upon all errands, Greeks, Jews, Syrians, perhaps even Saracens, tribes and nations regarded in Anglo-Saxondom as strange creatures, whose existence was easier to admit than to realise. The character of the Pope and the circumstances of his day would also be powerful educational influences, supposing Alfred old enough to profit by them. Leo the Fourth was one of the greatest of the Popes. An Italian of Northern extraction, as it would seem, he had been elected as the fittest person to defend

Rome against the Saracens, who had pillaged churches within its precincts under his predecessor. He had successfully repulsed their attacks, and at the time of Alfred's visit was constructing the fortified bulwark which, as the Leonine city, preserves his name to this day. This state of things must have been deeply impressive to Alfred, fresh from a land also scourged by the attacks of heathens, and barbarians beside, which the Saracens were not. Here he might in a manner foresee and rehearse the part reserved for himself. Nor can anything be more likely than that Leo took a deep interest in the hopeful young prince, son of one of the most religious kings of his day. Ethelwulf's own pilgrimage to Rome, indeed, has been, though hardly upon sufficient authority, said to have produced the national tribute of "Peter's pence," afterwards rightly deemed a disgrace, but in which no one at the time saw anything humiliating. The germ had been deposited by Offa's promise of thirty pence a day towards the relief of the poor and the lighting of St. Peter's.

Pope Leo IV.

From Platina's "Lives of the Popes"

Alfred's visit to Rome

Alfred's visit to Rome was connected with a singular event. The Pope "took him to his bishopson, and hallowed him to king." Mr. Freeman is no doubt right in considering that a circumstance so clearly asserted by Alfred's biographer should not be rejected merely from the difficulty of understanding it. The difficulty is unquestionably very great. Perhaps some light may be thrown upon it by the comparison with the action of the Emperor Constantine Pogonatus in the seventh century in sending locks of the hair of his sons Justinian and Heraclius to Rome, thereby making them the adopted children of St. Peter and his successors. No question of the succession could arise in this instance, as both the sons were thus consecrated; and if it was now intended to give Alfred any right to the crown superior to his brothers the ceremony remained a dead letter. He was named by his father's will in the regular order of succession, and he did not come to the throne until after the deaths of all his brothers, although under the last, Ethelred, he seems to have borne the title of king. The incident of his "hallowing," whatever interpretation may be put upon it, confirms the view that Alfred's visit to Rome was paid in boyhood and not in infancy. It would be more appropriate in the case of a young prince who was manifesting abundant promise than of a child whose capabilities must be uncertain.

In 855 Alfred's father, Ethelwulf, appeared in Rome. He had

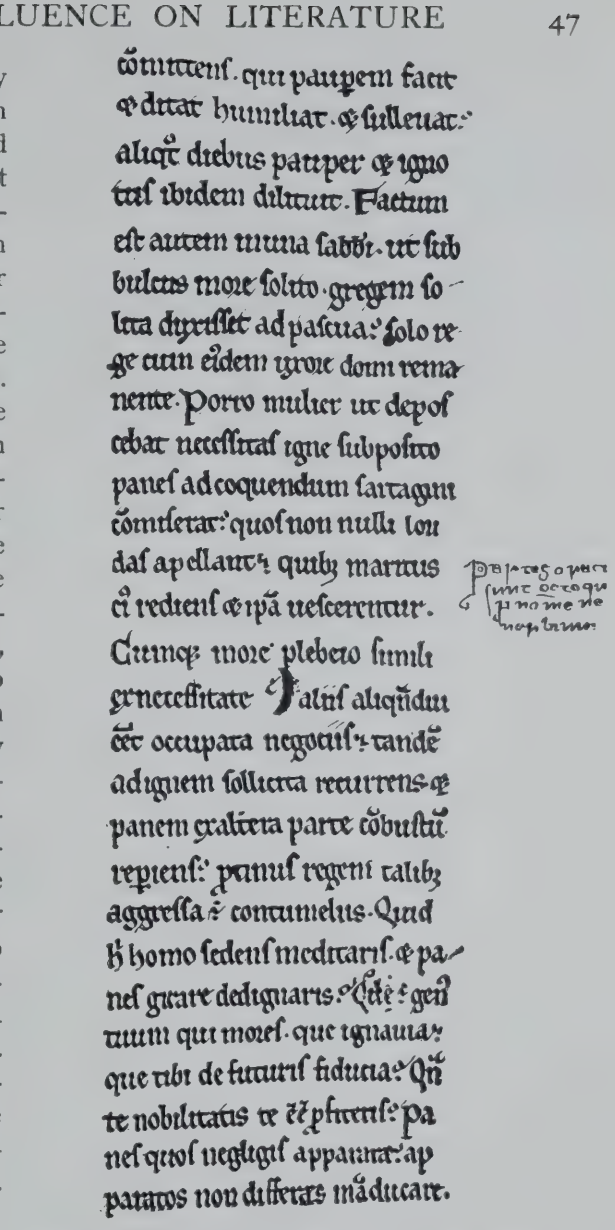
Life of Alfred until his accession

travelled through the dominions of Charles the Bald, King of the West Franks, who received him with great honour. On his arrival in Rome Leo the Fourth was either dead or dying, and Ethelwulf was a witness of the tumultuous proceedings which attended the election of his successor, Benedict the Third. These did not impair his devotion to the Holy See; his piety required a year's stay in Rome, at the end of which he departed homeward, taking his son with him. The incidents of his journey must have had a strong influence upon the intellectual development of the young prince if of sufficient age. It may be reasonably conjectured that at his stay at Charles the Bald's court in the preceding year Ethelwulf had become enamoured of Charles's daughter Judith, then scarcely of marriageable age. At all events he was betrothed to her on his return in July 856, and the marriage took place in France in October. The Anglo-Saxon king and his son must have spent the intervening period at the Frankish king's court, where Alfred would meet the chief literary characters of the age—Rabanus Maurus, Servatus Lupus, above all Scotus Erigena. The example of a royal court where learning was highly honoured must have been most suggestive and stimulating to him, and Englishmen are probably under much obligation to the involuntary causes of his residence, King Ethelwulf and Queen Judith. They did not think so at the time. The foreign marriage was most unpopular. The sons Ethelwulf had left behind him refused to accept their girl-stepmother, and resisted his endeavours to reseat himself on the throne of Wessex. Ethelwulf retired with his young wife to the sub-kingdom of Kent, where he died in 858, and Ethelbald, his successor in the kingdom of Wessex, healed the family breach in the most effectual manner by marrying Judith himself. Of Alfred's attitude in these transactions we have no knowledge, on any hypothesis respecting his age he was too young to take a prominent part in them. The special affection shown him by his father justifies the supposition that he abode with him until his death, and he would participate in the ensuing family reconciliation. He certainly made no attempt to avail himself of any claim to the throne which the papal consecration might be supposed to have given him, and appears to have lived in retirement until, in 866, the death of his brothers Ethelbald and Ethelbert without issue left him heir-presumptive to their successor Ethelred. From this time he appears prominent in peace and war, and during the five years of his brother's reign is described as his "secundarius" or lieutenant.

Alfred's victories over the Danes

It is foreign to our purpose to detail the numerous battles by which, as Professor Freeman sums up the matter, "When the Scandinavian invasions threatened the utter overthrow of England, and especially of English Christianity, Alfred saved his own kingdom from the general wreck, and made it the centre for the deliverance and union of the whole country." The point for the historian of literature is that in so doing Alfred, aside from his own writings and his works as an educator of his

people, enacted a great literary part. But for him Anglo-Saxon letters would have perished; and although England would not have been illiterate, its literature would not have been English. From 866, the year when Alfred first appears conspicuously in public life, the Danish plan of operation alters. The Danes are no longer mere freebooters; they settle down and establish regularly organised kingdoms, and but for their ultimate defeat would have Scandinavianised the whole country. They must have eventually embraced Christianity, but before things had come to that point the Anglo-Saxon speech would in all probability have been absorbed or expelled. Alfred rescued our language as well as our independence and nationality. There is no contemporary partner or rival in his glory, and no ground for thinking that England could have been preserved if Alfred had not existed,—a scathing rebuke to the historical theories which disparage individual action in comparison with assumed general laws.



Twelfth Century MS. Life of St. Neot. Here first occurs the story of Alfred and the Cakes

Description.—A late twelfth-century copy of a work composed shortly after the Norman Conquest, purporting to narrate the life of St. Neot, the Cornish anchorite. It is in this romance that the story of Alfred and the cakes first makes its appearance, and hence it was adopted into the interpolated version of Asser's *Life of Alfred*.

Translation.—"Now it happened one day that the swineherd (with whom Alfred had taken refuge) had driven out his herds as usual to their pasture, and the king was left alone with his wife in the house. Thereupon the woman, in the course of her household duties, had lit a fire, and placed the cakes for her own and her husband's dinner in a cooking-pan upon it to bake. Being then, as is apt to happen with poor folks, occupied for some time with other business, presently she ran back anxiously to the fire, and found the cakes burnt on one side. Whereupon she forthwith assailed the king with reproaches: 'What are you sitting thinking here for, fellow, and can't take the trouble to turn the cakes? What's your country? Where did you learn manners? What idleness! What do you expect to become of you? You call yourself a noble? You won't help to cook the cakes, but you are not slow to eat them when they are cooked.' The king, thus vehemently scolded, did not make any impatient answer, but, fortified with gentleness and patience, like a second Job, 'in all this sinned not with his lips, nor charged God foolishly.'"

Alfred's more direct services to the literature of his country fall under two heads, his authorship and his endeavours to promote lettered

culture. The former was the chief instrument of the latter, and the two are so combined as hardly to admit of separation.

Alfred as a man of letters

The sovereigns who have deserved the highest praise as protectors of letters have not always been themselves distinguished as authors. Except the Mogul Emperor Akhbar, to whom, with Marcus Aurelius, among all rulers, he seems to offer the strongest resemblance, Alfred stands highest in both departments together, though far from attaining the first rank in either taken by itself. Inferior to the first Roman Emperor as an author, to the second as a patron, he yet achieved more in authorship than Augustus, and was a more useful patron of letters than Cæsar. His eminence here is not so much due to any extraordinary force of genius as to the circumstances of his time and country. We have seen that the Anglo-Saxons possessed a poetical literature by no means to be slighted; but we have encountered hardly any examples of a literature in prose, except a few homilies. Such a literature remained to be created. The first man who should attempt it with adequate faculty could hardly fail of making a deep mark, provided that his writings were such as were required by the age. Here Alfred is truly great in his modesty. He does not, as without any imputation of vanity he might have done, seek to celebrate his own exploits, or to gain reputation for wit and wisdom of his own. He simply considers what books are most likely to benefit his own people, and, his choice once made, sits down to the humble employment of a translator. In so doing he is quite unconsciously discharging a more important function than he deems, he is laying the foundation of English prose. He is, moreover, shifting his country's literary centre of gravity. Hitherto Anglo-Saxon literature has been poetical and Northumbrian; henceforth Wessex is to provide the dominant dialect, and the literature is mainly to run into prose. The literature of Northumbria is almost a blank for several centuries.

Alfred's translations

If it is a proof of Alfred's good sense that he rather chose to translate the works of others likely to be of substantial use to his countrymen than to strive for literary renown as an original author, this good sense is no less evinced in his selection of the books to be rendered into the vernacular. Those undoubtedly rendered by him or under his direction meet, in every instance, the needs of his age at some important point. They are :—

The *History of Orosius*, not merely an historical narrative, but as satisfactory an approach to a philosophy of history as the limited outlook and theological prejudice of the age of its composition allowed.

The *Pastoral Care* of Pope Gregory the Great, as good a manual for a clergy depressed into ignorance and barbarism by the misfortunes of the times as could well be compiled for an age in which the sacerdotal conception of the pastoral office was as yet the only one possible.

Gregory's *Dialogues*. A book of moral and religious tales, intended to be edifying, and all the more effective in the middle ages from its liberal infusion of the grotesque.

leopab dpiht 7 zeblectpab god min zpiheupahapen zod
U iuit dns & benedictus ds ms. & exaltetur ds
hæle me
salutis meę;
god þupeapabefc ppæce me zþuiadepheoddefc pole underp me
D s quidas uindictas michi. & subdis populos subme.
alyfend min of peondou me ppa unpalhe pisu
liberator ms degentibus me iracundis
zþiþa apafendú on me upahepefc me ppa peane unpuhe pisu
E tabinsurgentib: inme exaltabis me. ab iniquo
þugenepedefc me naman hinu realm iceþefe
eripies me; & mini tuo psalmu dicam ;
þoplan icandette þe onfolaum dpih 7 on-
P ropterea confitebor tibi innationib: dne. & n o
mid zende hælo bymmzð hiy 7 dæde mid heopenesse
M agnificans salutem regis eius. & faciens misericordiam
qupe hiy þazebalz deondauide zæd hiy ob onpendor
xpo suo dauid. & semini eius usque insæcln;

XVIII. In finem psalmus David.

heoponaf zecahþreccah pudop godes 7 peopc handa
Eli enarrant gloriam dei. & opa manú
hiy bodah pudop
eius adnuntiat firmamentum
dæzes þádæze þoplæcaþ þoplo 7 niht mhte zefcade þifdom
D ies diei eructat uerbu. & nox nocti indicat scientiã;
nepelpon zefþpecene 7 na þoplo þapa nebeah-
N on sunt loquele neq: sermones. quorum non
zehýpede þaþne heopa 7 eopþan þoplo heopa
audiantur uoces eorum; & in terre uerba eoru;
on ealne eopþgi uteode þpeh heopa 7 on ende zmbhyþe
I n omne terra exiuit sonus eor. & in fines orbis
onrunnan zefæce zoeclo hiy 7 heplh þpa þpa
I n sole posuit tabernaculum suum. & ipse tãquã
bpidguma þoplæan zende opleh bpýd hufe
sponsus procedens de thalamo suo
pihrumiah þpafpa ent to zehýnenne þeg orþa heon
E xultauit ut gigas ad currendam uiam. a summo
heoponú to zange hiy bebýde þpa heaú hiy
caelo egressio eius & abscondat a calore ei.;
7 ongenz anhiy of heannesse hiy ne ir þeþehine
T occursus ei usq: ad summu eius. nec est qui se
& dæh unzepæ medleu zecipherde þaple cýnnesse
L ex dni immaculata conuertens animas. testi
zode zecuþe zmæclot pic on zeapphzende þa lædan
moniu di fidele. sapientia prestans paruulis;

Latin Psalter with Anglo-Saxon Gloss.

[*Arundel MS.* 60, *British Museum.*]

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The *Consolation of Boethius*. There can be no surer touchstone of a refined and sensitive mind than its appreciation of this book. Alfred's admiration for it, the predilection with which he evidently regarded it, and his numerous variations and embellishments, sever him at once from the multitude of contemporary kings, and place him on a level with the other two monarchs who have most intimately united the philosophic character with efficiency in rule and administration, Marcus Aurelius and Akhbar. Any of the three, it is probable, if transferred to the place of the others, would have signalised himself in nearly the same manner. It should not be forgotten that of all the numerous mediæval translations of the *Consolation*, one of which is by Chaucer, Alfred's is the greatest.

The Venerable Beda's Ecclesiastical History. We have already described this book; so English in subject and sentiment that in rendering it, or causing it to be rendered, Alfred but restored it to the language to which it should always have belonged.

Of these books three, the *Orosius*, the *Cura Pastoralis*, and the *Boethius*, were undoubtedly translated by Alfred himself. The versions of the *Dialogues* and of Beda were probably made by others under his superintendence. That of the *Dialogues*, by Werferth, Bishop of Worcester, has not yet been printed. The translation of Beda, which does not claim to be Alfred's, is attributed to him by Aelfric, and the traces of the Mercian dialect which it has been thought to exhibit are not absolutely incompatible with this belief, as they may have been introduced by a copyist. Any version, however, executed under Alfred's direction was very likely to be ascribed to him.

Works erroneously or doubtfully ascribed to Alfred

Some other books have been attributed to Alfred. *King Alfred's Book of Martyrs* appears to be a work of the ninth century from not containing any narratives of more recent date, but its connection with Alfred seems merely conjectural. The *Blooms*, a translation or adaptation of Augustine's *Soliloquies* and his *Epistle to Paulina on the Vision of God*, with interpolations from other sources, is distinctly attributed to Alfred in the MS. The diction, nevertheless, is of much later date, but this may be due to the transcriber; and the connection between it and the version of Boethius, pointed out by Wülker, certainly is remarkable. Wülker is also inclined, on the strength of resemblances between Alfred's style and that of a version of fifty of the Psalms preserved in a manuscript at Paris, to accept William of Malmesbury's statement that Alfred translated the Psalms, and to recognise them as his work. If so, this were probably his last literary labour, interrupted by death.

Alfred, unlike some other erudite sovereigns, was far from allowing the charms of study to encroach upon the duties of monarchy. His literary activity falls into two periods, the first long delayed and afterwards interrupted by the duty of warring with the Dane. Having come to the throne in 871, he was engaged in continual warfare until 878. It was then, probably, that he issued perhaps the most important of all his works, but

not coming under the head of literature—his digest of laws, founded upon those of his predecessors, especially Ina, but thoroughly revised and adapted to the times, and confirmed by the assent of his official counsellors. In 884 war again broke out. In 886 Alfred was busy fortifying London, but about this time he seems to have invited to court Asser, the Welsh monk of St. David's, his future biographer. Sickness prevented Asser's arrival until the following year, when Alfred devoted himself to studying Latin with him for eight months. Whatever acquaintance with the language he had gained at Rome must probably have become faint, but he must have thoroughly regained it, for his versions from the Latin are evidently the work of a single hand, and not patched or verified by a corrector. In his own simple words, prefixed to the translation of Pope Gregory's *Pastoral Care*:—

"When I reflected how the teaching of the Latin language had recently decayed through this people of the Angles, and yet many could read English writing, then I began among other various and manifold businesses of this kingdom to turn into English the book that is called *Pastoralis* in Latin, and *Hierde Bóc* in English, sometimes word for word, sometimes sense for sense, just as I learned it of Plegmund my archbishop, and of Asser my bishop, and of Grimbald my priest, and of John my priest. After I had learned it so that I understood it and could render it with fullest meaning, I translated it into English."

Alfred, then, did not sit down to make a translation relying upon his general knowledge of Latin, but, with competent assistance, went carefully and minutely through the very book that was to be rendered, and made sure that he thoroughly understood it before he began to translate it. This was not with the intention of being literal, for his version is frequently paraphrastic, and he interpolates additions both of his own and from other sources. He made it no point of conscience to reproduce his original with accuracy: the point of view from which a translation appears a work of art was entirely foreign to him, he aimed merely at an adaptation with a strictly utilitarian object. Latin was then the key of knowledge, which he desired to place in the hands of his countrymen.

"Therefore to me it seemeth better, if it seemeth so to you, that we also some books, those that most needful are for all men to be acquainted with, that we turn those into the speech which we all can understand, and that ye do as we very easily may with God's help, if we have the requisite peace, that all the youth which now is in England of free men, of those who have the means to be able to go in for it, be set to learning while they are fit for no other business, until such time as they can thoroughly read English writing: afterwards further instruction may be given in the Latin language to such as are intended for a more advanced education, and are to be prepared for higher office."

The mention in the same preface of Plegmund as archbishop shows

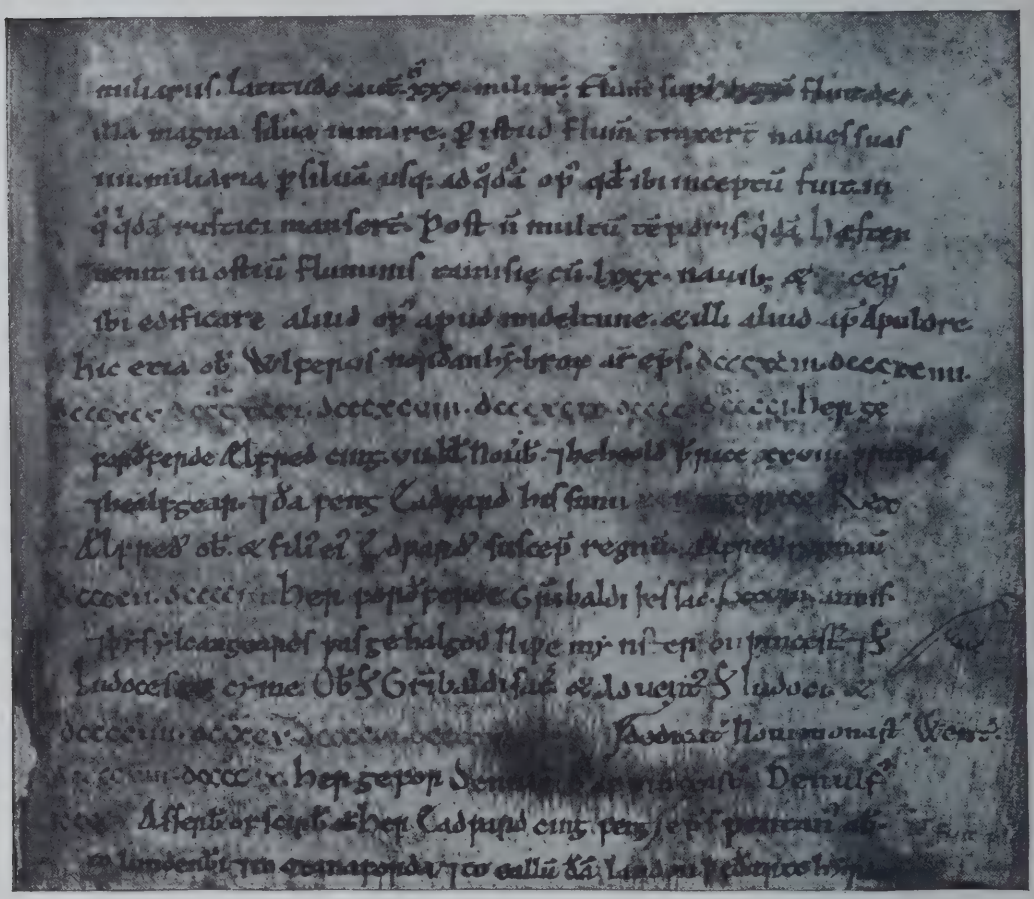
that it was not written before 890. The most probable order of the works translated by Alfred or by his instructions seems on the whole to be: (1) Gregory's *Pastoral;* (2) Beda; (3) Orosius—all between 890 and 893; (4) Boethius; (5) Gregory's *Dialogues;* (6) The Psalms, if his. The *Book of Martyrs*, if he were connected with it, would be one of the latest. The *Blooms* may perhaps be doubtfully identified with a kind of commonplace-book mentioned by Asser, in which case its compilation may have lasted throughout the whole of Alfred's literary period.

Of these works the Boethius is the most interesting, both from the special merit of the original and the peculiarity of Alfred's own handling of it. The subject of the treatise, it may be necessary to inform some readers, is the consolation supposed to be administered by Philosophy to the author, the noble and accomplished Boethius, the last of the Romans, minister of Theodoric, King of Italy, as, about 525 A.D., he lies captive awaiting sentence of death from his jealous and misguided master, a near parallel to the case of Henry VIII. and Sir Thomas More. "In view," says Mr. Stewart, the chief modern English writer on Boethius, "of Alfred's literary motive and personal tastes, the reader of his translations must not look for any strict adherence to the original. He expands and curtails as the spirit moves him. It is on his translation of Boethius that his personality is most strongly impressed. That he had from the first no intention of adhering strictly to the text before him, either in thought or form, is shown by his changing the original arrangement of five books of alternate verse and prose into forty-two chapters, and by his substituting for the two persons of the dialogue Wisdom and Reason in place of Philosophy; and now the Mind, now Boethius, now the personal pronoun in place of the Philosopher. His method of dealing with the difficulty and obscurity of the Latin is summary. He finds out the gist of the philosopher's meaning, and proceeds to adapt and weld it to his liking, as he thinks will be the most profitable to the readers of his time, adding here a homely illustration, there an explanatory note, now expanding the frequent sentences into a long paraphrase, and now cutting the knot of a long passage by the simple expedient of omission, and interpreting the whole by the light of Christian doctrine." There is, it need not be said, nothing doctrinal in the original; the arguments to prove Boethius a Christian, which are not devoid of weight, are not derived from the *Consolation*. Had the work, however, existed solely in Alfred's translation there would have been no controversy on the subject. Boethius's philosophical theism is Hebraised by a strong infusion of Scriptural references. "In Alfred's eyes, the city of Truth from which Boethius is exiled becomes the Heavenly Jerusalem; the haven of quiet whither the wise man turns for shelter from the storms of life is Christ. The mention of the fiery lava-flood of Aetna suggests the deluge; the universal rule of obedience to the Creator reminds him of one signal exception, the outbreak of the rebellious angels; the Titans piling Pelion on Ossa to reach to heaven find a parallel in Nimrod's vain attempt to scale the sky with

Alfred's Boethius

the tower of Babel." The extensive interpolations which frequently occur are usually in the same sense. As it is only by these that Alfred's style as an original author can be appreciated, we give one from Dr. Sedgefield's version :—

"All creatures Thou hast made alike, and in some things also not alike.



Extract from Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in English and Latin of the Eleventh Century showing brief mention of Alfred's death :

British Museum, Cott. MS. Dom. A 8

"DCCCCI in this year died King Alfred on the 26th of October ; and he held the kingdom twenty-eight years and a half ; and then Eadward his son took the kingdom"

Though Thou hast given one name to all creatures, naming them the World when taken together, yet Thou hast parted the single name among four creatures : one is Earth, the second Water, the third Air, the fourth Fire. To each of them Thou hast appointed its own separate place ; each is kept distinct from the other, and yet held in bonds of peace by Thine ordinance, so that none of them should overstep the other's bounds, but cold brooketh heat, and wet suffereth dry. Earth and water have a cold nature ; earth is dry

and cold ; water wet and cold. Air is defined as both cold and wet and also warm. This is not to be wondered at, for air is created half-way between the dry cold earth and the hot fire. Fire is uppermost above all these worldly creatures. Wonderful is Thy contriving to have done both things : namely, to have bounded things one over against the other, and likewise to have mingled the dry cold earth beneath the cold wet water, so that the yielding and flowing water hath a home in the solid earth, being unable to stand alone. The earth holdeth the water and in some degree sucketh it in, and is maintained by what it sucketh, so that it groweth and beareth blossoms and likewise fruits ; for, if the water did not moisten it, it would dry up and be scattered by the wind like dust or ashes. No living thing could enjoy the land or the water, nor dwell in either for the cold, if Thou hadst not in some measure mingled them with fire. With marvellous skill Thou hast so ordered that fire doth not burn up water and earth, when mingled with either ; nor again do water and earth wholly quench fire."

The Anglo-Saxon prose of the day was thus very straightforward and simple, neglectful of ornament, and little capable of expressing abstruse thought. The impressiveness which it possesses arises mainly from the character of the writer. If he be a man like Alfred, the force of the personality will irradiate the artlessness of the phraseology. It must be remembered that this was almost the first prose that had been written in English, and that a distinction between lettered and colloquial speech was hardly recognised. Prose is always younger than her sister Poetry, and her beginnings are more timid and awkward. Whether Alfred can claim the title of poet is doubtful. The numerous poetical compositions interspersed through the *Consolation* are in his version rendered into prose ; but the work is accompanied by a metrical translation of them, or rather a metrical elaboration of the old version, distinctly attributed to him by the writer of an anonymous preface. "These cares are very hard for us to reckon that in his days came upon the kingdoms to which he had succeeded, and yet when he had studied this book and turned it from Latin into English prose, he wrought it up once more into verse, as it is now done." The editor, therefore, wrote at some subsequent period of tranquillity : if under Athelstan or even Edgar his testimony deserves respect, even though apparently contrary to a short prelude in verse prefixed to the metrical renderings, hardly so if under Edward the Confessor. Without doubt, however, the version is of the age of Alfred, and extracts may serve well as specimens of the Anglo-Saxon poetry of his time :—

O Thou Creator of bright constellations
Of heaven and earth ; Thou on the high-seat
Eternal reignest and the round heaven
All swiftly movest, and through Thy holy might
The lights of heaven makest to hear Thee,
E'en as the sun scattereth darkness
Of the swart night time through Thy strong power,

And with her pale beams the bright stars
The moon doth humble through Thy might's moving :
At whiles too she robbeth the radiant sun
Of his full light, when it befalleth
That they come together by close compulsion.
So too the glorious star of morning
That we by its other name star of evening
Oft hear called, Thou constrainest
To follow the way where the sun wendeth ;
Every year he must ever travel,
Fare before him. O Father, Thou sendest
Long days in summer, with heat sultry ;
To the winter also wondrous short days
Hast Thou granted. To the trees Thou givest
South-west breezes when the black tempest
Sprung from the north-east had utterly stript them
Of every leaf with its loathly wind.

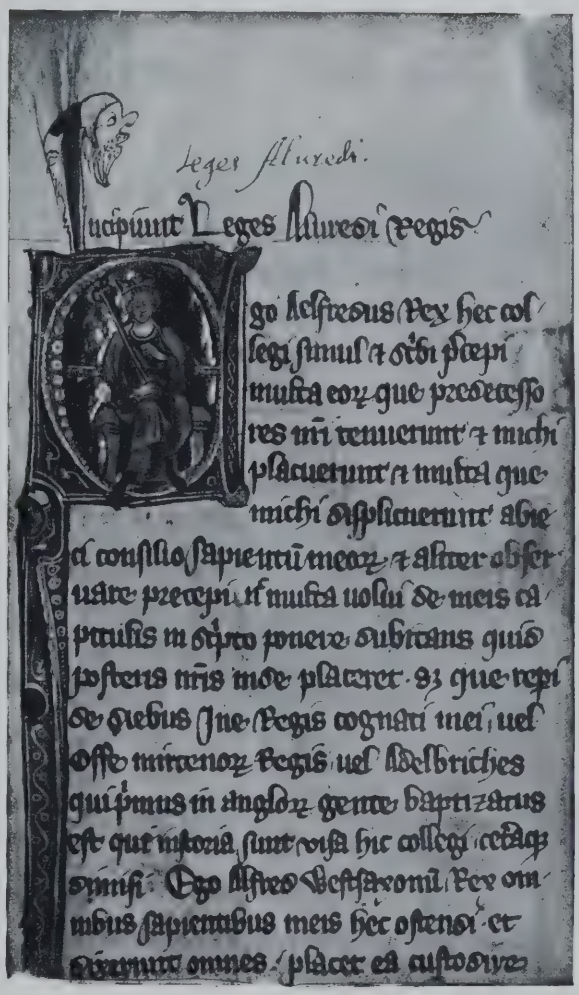
Behold all creatures in the earth's compass
Obey Thy hests ; the same do they in heaven
With mind and main, save man only ;
He oftenest worketh in despite of Thy will.
Ah ! Thou Eternal and Thou Almighty,
Author and Ruler of all creation,
Pity the offspring of Thy poor world !

O sons of mankind, o'er earth moving,
Let each that hath freedom find out the way
To the eternal goodness whereof our speech is,
And to the blessings that are our song's burden.
The man that is straitly bound by the sway
Of the worthless love of this world glorious,
Let him right soon seek for himself
Fulness of freedom, that forthwith he may come
Into the blessings of the Bidder of spirits ;
For this is the rest from all our wrestling,
The hopeful haven for the high vessels
Of the minds of us men, mild harbour bright.
This is the only hithe we ever shall have
After the tossing of troublous billows,
After each tempest, truly peaceful.
This is the sanctuary, the sole comfort
Of all weary mortals, when they are over,
Our worldly troubles ; 'tis the winsome bourne
That shall be ours to own after these hardships.

Alfred's history and geography

Alfred's choice of the Spaniard Orosius's epitome of general history (compiled A.D. 416) might also be considered as a proof of discrimination if the fact had not been that he had hardly any choice in the matter. Orosius, according to his patron St. Augustine, "a young presbyter, zealous, alert in intellect, ready of speech, and fitted to be useful in the work of the Lord," was the only writer extant in Alfred's day likely to find general acceptance as the author of a manual of general history, inasmuch as he was the only Christian historian. It might almost be added that he was the only philosophical historian, for—slender as his abilities might

appear in comparison with the great authors of the past, he had lived at the period when history first became ripe for philosophical treatment, and was in fact the mouthpiece of no less remarkable a genius than St. Augustine. Augustine's narrow theory of history was, with all its defects, the first theory of history that had ever been broached; nor indeed was any theory possible until material for thought should have been provided by greater mutations in the world's affairs than had been beheld by Thucydides or Tacitus. The speculations of St. Augustine thus indicated a distinct advance in the evolution of the human mind, and by their recognition of a divine plan and purpose in history became invested with a moral value which in Alfred's eyes no doubt transcended their utility as a mere record of events. Even from this latter point of view Orosius's jejune abstract probably gave Alfred's countrymen as much information as they were able to turn to account. Orosius was a geographer as well as an historian, and the geographical portion of his treatise inspired Alfred with the happy idea of himself drawing up a geographical account of the Northern lands unknown to his author. This little treatise, excellent in every way, entitles Alfred to the fame of the first English geographer. It is accompanied by accounts of voyages related to him by visitors to his court—Ohtere the Norwegian, who had doubled the North Cape and explored the White Sea; and Wulfstan, a Dane, who had visited Esthonia. These documents, most interesting in themselves, sufficiently attest Alfred's insatiable curiosity and zeal for the publication as well as the acquisition of knowledge.



Beginning of the Laws of Alfred

From a MS. in the British Museum

The most remarkable feature of Alfred's translation of Gregory's

Pastoral Care is the well-known preface in which he laments the decay of learning owing to the Danish invasions, and makes the remarkable statement that when he came to the throne not a single priest to the south of the Thames was acquainted with Latin. "In former days," he says, "people from abroad came to this land for wisdom and instruction, and now we should have to get them abroad if we were going to have them." The existence of any scholarly class apart from the clergy being in Alfred's day impossible, the elevation of the general standard of culture must necessarily begin by the elevation of the clergy, and probably no better first step could have been taken than the translation and dissemination of the treatise of the greatest of the Popes. After a while the paths of Gregory and Alfred would diverge. Gregory wished to make the clergy supreme in the State: Alfred would make them instruments for the general good. For a while they could travel on together; but could Alfred have lived to the time of Dunstan he must have appeared in a new character, and the voice of the ecclesiastics who then monopolised history would not have been so uniformly favourable to him. It was his marvellous good fortune to live exempt from controversies, to have no enemies except the enemies of his people; no rivals to dispute his throne; no ministers to challenge a share of his glory; no foreign interference; no inward temptation; no hostile critics; no jealous detractor; to be one not too far in advance of his times nor in any respect behind them; a unique example of a man whom none could wish in any respect other than what he was.

Before parting with Alfred, it should be pointed out that the life of him by his teacher, Bishop Asser, has been so largely interpolated that Mr. Thomas Wright and Sir Henry Howorth have doubted its authenticity. Such romantic legends as the burning of the cakes, and such unhistorical statements as the foundation of the university of Oxford by Alfred exist, however, only in late MSS., and were not found in a nearly contemporary manuscript of the tenth century, which unfortunately perished in the fire which consumed so much of the Cottonian Library in 1732, but not until it had been edited by Francis Wise (Oxford, 1722). These interpolations are not noticed by Florence of Worcester, who wrote at the beginning of the twelfth century, and continually copies Asser without naming him. Professor Freeman, moreover, has pointed out little touches of internal evidence almost proving that the author must have been a Celt.

Nothing is more noteworthy in the history of English literature and education in Alfred's time than the degree in which all intellectual impulse is imparted by the King, at once the mechanist and the mainspring of the entire machinery. He is his people's sole teacher and their sole legislator. Asser, Plegmund, and the other eminent men around him would apparently have remained undistinguished without him; great as the desert must have been the merit which brought Asser out of a Welsh monastery and Plegmund out of a hermitage. Alfred's history repeats

that of Charlemagne, who "brought learning to France by drawing to it from Anglia and Italy the best plants for his new fields;" if on a miniature scale the reason is not that Alfred is a miniature of Charles the Great, but that Anglo-Saxon England is a miniature of the Continent. In both cases we see what we shall not see again for a long time—the secular power coming to the front in intellectual things, and making the spiritual power its instrument and satellite. According to the ideas of the age the process should have been reversed: the transposition was, in fact, only possible when the man of the sword should be a man of the pen also. Alfred was the sole bookman of his family. Many princes of his house approached his fame as a warrior and a ruler, not one showed the slightest disposition to take his place as guide and fosterer of the national culture; offices which the public opinion of the day assigned to the clergy, and which, rescued in some measure by Alfred's exertions from the barbarism which had all but engulphed them, they proceeded to assume.

Consolidation of English monarchy in tenth century

Whether Alfred, with all his docile piety, would have regarded this intellectual domination of the clergy as an ideal may well be doubted; but when learning no longer sat upon the throne in his person, the crozier must take the sceptre's vacant place to prevent his work from perishing. His immediate successors, Edward the Elder and Athelstane, were excellent monarchs who consistently followed up Alfred's policy of the consummation of national unity by the consolidation of Englishmen, whether men of Mercia or men of Wessex, and Danes, whether men of East Anglia or men of Northumbria, into a single state: a policy which received its visible seal and authentication by Edgar's coronation at Bath in 973. While this unifying movement was progressing in the State, another movement of no less importance was transforming the Church. The ignorance of the clergy, and the vices which were its almost inevitable concomitants, had, as we have seen, excited the animadversion of Alfred, and he had endeavoured to remove them by instruction. After his death, the undertaking for which his successors felt no vocation fell into the hands of the ecclesiastical rulers. It would be unjust to charge them with indifference to the morals or the education of the clergy, but they thought much more of reducing them to the pattern of Roman discipline, and in particular of constraining them to celibacy. Their great weapon was the multiplication of monasteries, and the introduction or restoration of the rule of St. Benedict of Nursia, Abbot of Monte Cassino in the sixth century, and the first great organiser of monasticism in Latin Christendom. Hence a contest between the monastic orders and the regular clergy which lasted from about 940

Coin of Edward the Elder

until nearly the end of the century, and was only in some measure appeased for a time by the drastic remedy of a second cycle of Danish invasion. The Crown, more particularly under Edgar, sided with the monks and the archbishops; the truth seems to be that the irregularities of Edgar's dissolute youth had given the churchmen a strong hold upon him. One of these ecclesiastics, moreover, notwithstanding the ill-repute into which he has been brought by unscrupulous miracle-mongers, was a man of commanding genius and noble nature; and Dunstan (924–988), Archbishop of Canterbury from 961, may well have deemed his ideal of the religious life higher than that of his opponents. At the time the standard both of morals and of learning was unquestionably highest among the monastic orders: it is only when we consider how infinitely more exalted the standard of the nation at large would have been if, during the centuries between Dunstan and the Reformation, it could have enjoyed the example of the domestic virtues of a married clergy, that we realise how heavy was the misfortune when the ideas of Latin and Oriental races were thrust upon a people to which they were by nature entirely uncongenial.

Coin of Edgar

Ecclesiastical spirit of the age

The generally ecclesiastical bent of the tenth century in England was not unattended by intellectual advantages, but benefited art rather than literature. The erection of forty richly endowed monasteries promoted architecture, and communicated a still more powerful stimulus to the arts upon which the splendour of religious service depends. Music was greatly improved, and representations of minstrelsy and its instruments are frequent in the richly illuminated manuscripts which became common. Two styles of illumination had since the seventh century existed in the country—the Celtic, introduced by Irish monks into Northumbria, and the classical, prevalent in the South of England. In the tenth century this latter definitively triumphed, but was modified into a new style, distinguished by its elegance and grace. Costume, embroidery, the manufacture of gold and silver plate, received a powerful development. Literature, nevertheless, remained nearly barren save for some outbursts of ballad and patriotic poetry, the consideration of which we defer for the present. The religious poetry of the time is either translated, or repeats familiar ideas. The most important poem, which appears to be a translation from the Low German, is another working up of the story of Genesis, called the "later" or "younger" Genesis to distinguish it from the earlier pieces which pass under the name of Caedmon. The resemblance to Milton is often striking; but if Milton, as in a preceding chapter we have admitted not to be impossible, had access through an interpreter to Anglo-Saxon sources, the reference was

probably made to the so-called "Genesis B." The Low German and Anglo-Saxon poets undoubtedly, Milton less certainly, were not unacquainted with the Latin Christian poet Avitus, Bishop of Vienne, whose poem, *De spiritalis historiæ gestis*, written towards the end of the fifth century, was very popular in the middle ages. With the Genesis may be classed the three poems known collectively as *Christ and Satan*, but complete in themselves in so far as they are not mutilated, on the Fall of the Rebel Angels, Christ's Descent into Hell and Ascension, and the Temptation. They have no great poetical pretensions, and their loose structure shows that the severity of the ancient metrical rules was becoming relaxed, but there was no capacity to devise new forms. Some metrical translations from the Latin are only interesting as proofs that Anglo-Saxon poetry was still read or recited, and Latin poetry here and there understood.

In prose the first half of the tenth century was entirely barren but for the contemporary portions of the Saxon Chronicle to be noticed hereafter. Somewhat later we have a *Leech Book* of medical recipes; and the *Blickling Homilies*, for the most part composed about this time, and chiefly interesting as a transition to, and in some measure a contrast with, the more important works of Aelfric, next to be mentioned. The contrast lies in the taste of the Blickling homilists for apocryphal legends and marvels rejected by the sane judgment of Aelfric. The homilies are by different authors. One is dated with the year of delivery, 971; others seem to be considerably older. Blickling is in Norfolk, and these discourses are the first Anglo-Saxon compositions that can be directly connected with East Anglia. If composed for the surrounding population, they would seem to indicate that the speech of the Danish settlers had by this time melted into Anglo-Saxon. Very few Danish words are to be found in Anglo-Saxon literature until after the Conquest.

Aelfric's homilies

The principal seat, notwithstanding, of the homiletic literature which was for a time to constitute the chief intellectual feature of the age was not in East Anglia but at Winchester. There Ethelwold, Abbot of Abingdon, a more ardent promoter of monasticism and antagonist of clerical marriage than Dunstan himself, became Bishop in 963. He gave the school of Winchester the same position as a centre of ecclesiastical learning as York had formerly enjoyed, and although no book of importance is attributed to him except a liturgical manual in Latin, he was a man of culture as well as of erudition, and instructed his pupils in poetry as well as in grammar. The first act of his episcopate was to expel the secular clergy from the cathedral and fill their places with monks from Abingdon Abbey. Among these probably came **Aelfric**, the most learned and eloquent man of his time, in whose hands Anglo-Saxon attained not indeed the highest development of which it was capable, but the highest permitted by the circumstances of the age. The most important of his original works are two books of homilies, each containing forty sermons, issued respectively in 991 and 992. Even these

are not entirely original, being frequently translated from the Latin; but they are valuable as examples of the best Anglo-Saxon style of the period, and even more so as decisively proving that the Anglo-Saxon Church did not hold the doctrine of Transubstantiation in Aelfric's time. Translations of the sermon on Easter Sunday, where this point is more particularly developed, have been frequently issued, especially by Archbishop Parker and other bishops in 1566, under the title of *A Testimonie of Antiquitie.* Aelfric's homilies are further noticeable for their avoidance of apocryphal narratives. The following passage on the birth of the Virgin is characteristic of his mode of thought:—

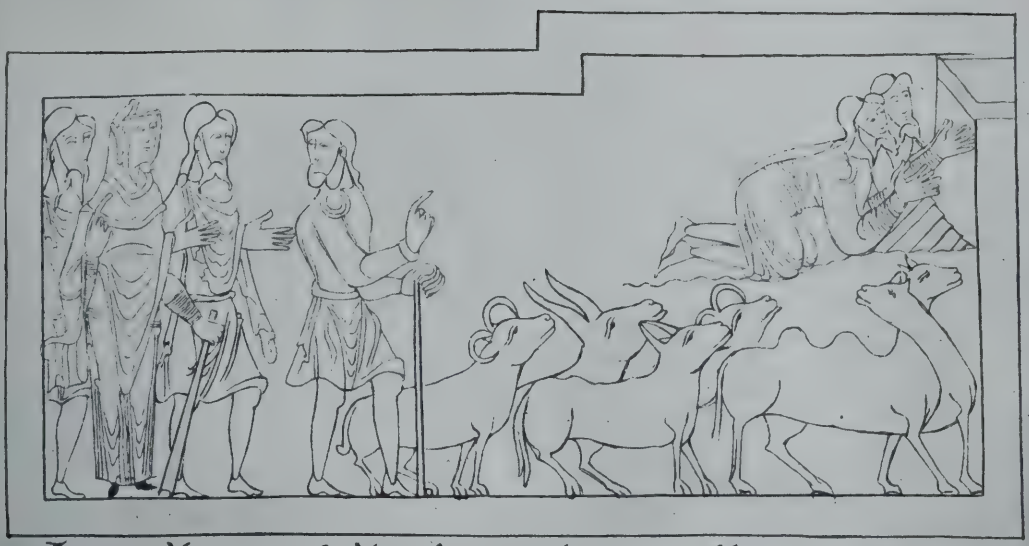
"What shall we say in regard to the time of Mary's birth, save that she was begotten by her father and mother like other people, and was born on the day that we call *sexta idus Septembris?* Her father was called Joachim and her mother Anna, pious people according to the ancient law, but we will write no more of them lest we fall into some error. The Gospel itself for this day is very hard for laymen to understand; it is, for the most part, filled out with the names of holy men, and these require a very long explanation of their spiritual meaning. Hence we will leave it unsaid."

Evidently Aelfric preferred the shallows where the child can wade to the deeps where the elephant can swim, and considering the times in which he wrote and the people whom he addressed, his sobriety was eminently judicious. He embodies the best traits of the national character, sturdy veracity and homely common-sense.

Qualities so valuable made Aelfric acceptable to the leading men of his age. He was made Abbot of Cerne, and afterwards of Ensham; he composed discourses for Archbishop Wulfstan of York, and other great ecclesiastics; and after translating the book of Job, he rendered the first seven books of the Old Testament into the vernacular to gratify his chief patron, the Ealdorman Ethelweald. Part he only gave in abridgment, fearing lest his countrymen should conform themselves too literally to the example of the patriarchs. He also incorporates an older version of the earlier portion of Genesis. He further composed in 996 a volume of homilies on the Passions of the Saints, in which, as in some portions of his Biblical translations, he employs an alliterative prose hardly distinguishable from verse. In Latin he produced a valuable life of his original patron, Bishop Ethelwold; a Latin grammar on the model of Donatus and Priscian, dedicated to the youth of England; and a *Colloquium* or exercise in speaking Latin, at the present day the most interesting of all his works for its descriptions of the daily life of men of various classes of society. He was living as late as 1014, when he wrote a pastoral letter, or a portion of one, for Archbishop Wulfstan.

Other ecclesiastical writings

Wulfstan himself has been reckoned among English authors on the strength of a collection of fifty-three homilies composed or translated about the end of the tenth or beginning of the eleventh century, and edited by Professor Napier. Only four are undoubtedly by an author of



Abrã rodlice þæt ſpyðe þelg ongolde ⁊ on ſeolfre ⁊ on ſtre ⁊ on
geceldũ. ⁊ þæt land ne mihte aberan þa he begen (aheof) he ⁊ loth dt
gædere punedon. Heora æhta wæron menig fealde. ⁊ ne mihton
puna ⁊ dt gædere. Þeah eac ðurh done tingan ſacu betux
abrames hyrde mannũ ⁊ lothes. Ondðe tide punedon chana
neut. ⁊ eſt ezeut ondã lande. Abrã ſæcæd to lothe. ic bidde
þæt nan ſacu nes betux me. ⁊ ðe. ne betux minũ hyrdũ.
⁊ ðinũ hyrdũ. þyt ſynd gebroðru. Eall ne eal land eow ide lid
dt ſoplande. ic bidde þa ſtã me. Gyf ðu þæt to þe pynſtran
healfe. ic healde þa ſuðran healfe. gyf þu donne þa ſuðran
healfe gecyſt. ic ſæle to þe pynſtran healfe. Loth ða beheold
geond eall. ⁊ ge ſeah þeall ſe eaſta pidda ea ioꝛdanen þæt myꝛ.
ge mid þæteſte gemenged. ſpa ſpa godes neoꝛxna pang. ær ſpa
egyptaland becumendum to ſegoꝛ dh þanne þe god toſende ða
burga ſodomam ⁊ gomoꝛ ran:—

Ælfric. Paraphrase of the Pentateuch.

[*Cottonian MS., Claudius B. iv., British Museum.*]

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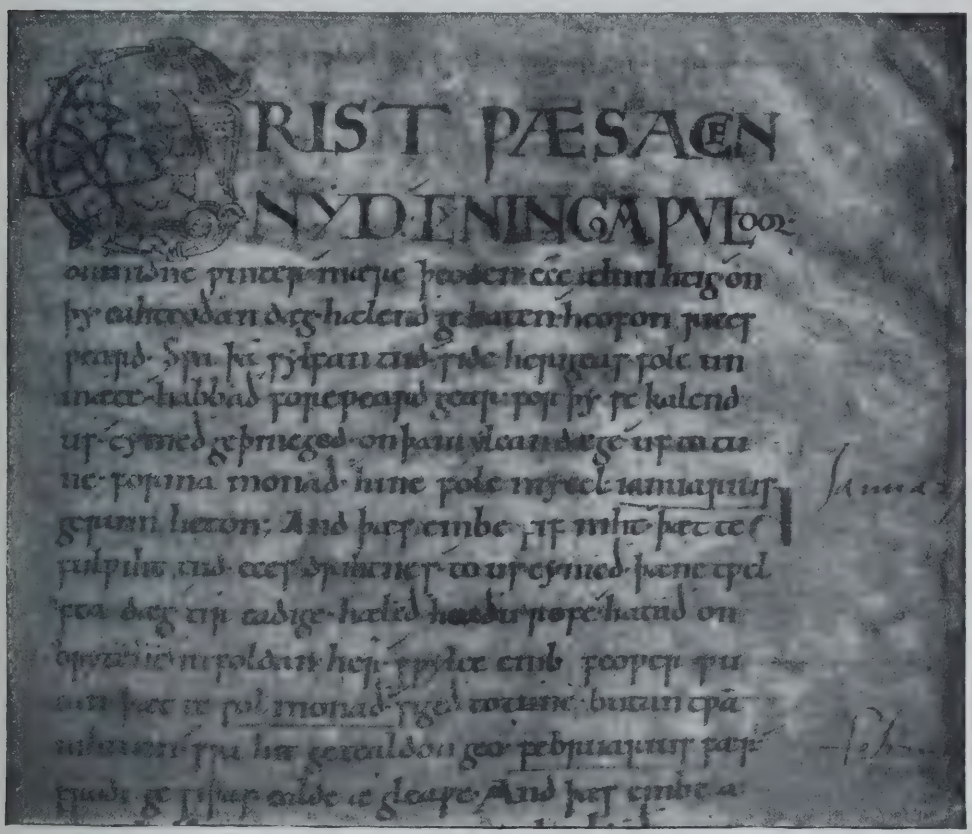
the name of Wulfstan, and his identity with the Archbishop does not seem certain.

Among other theological productions of the age may be named a version of the Gospels, afterwards published by Archbishop Parker, and commencing that grand series of mediæval translations of the Scriptures in which England surpasses every other country. There is also a version of the apocryphal



From a copy of the Saxon Chronicle in the British Museum

MS. Tib. B 1

Gospel of Nicodemus. Aldred's invaluable Northumbrian gloss on the Durham Gospels was probably written about the middle of the tenth century. In didactic literature we have a translation of the distichs of Valerius Cato, and two dialogues in verse and two in prose between Solomon and "Saturn." The origin of these is Hebraic; they belong to the extensive class of writings, founded on the history of the Queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon, in which the wise king is represented in friendly contest with visitors who come to make trial of his wisdom. One of these in the earliest form of Hebrew tradition is Hiram, King of Tyre, whose place at a later period is taken by "Marcolis," no other than Mercurius, whether the Gentile

deity or the Egyptian sage Hermes Trismegistus. Entering Europe, Marcolis became the German Marcolf or Morolf, and by a stroke of genius was transformed into the prototype of Eulenspiegel and Sancho Panza, plain coarse common-sense mocking divine philosophy, and low cunning winning an apparent triumph over lofty but unpractical wisdom. There is nothing of this profound double-edged irony in the Anglo-Saxon pieces, where "Saturn"—how coming by that appellation is hard to tell—manifests no trait of Morolf or Sancho, but is simply a propounder of queries sometimes encountered by meet replies, sometimes by a recital of the wildest imaginings of the Rabbis.

Danish conquest of England

While Aelfric was labouring to instruct the laity and raise the character of the clergy, England was suffering the most grievous calamities from the second series of Danish invasions, which, after many preliminary incursions, commenced systematically about 991, and continued until the general submission of the kingdom to Canute in 1017. The new affliction, however, was more tolerable than the old. The Danes were no longer mere freebooters, but aimed at conquest, and the victory they sought did not, like the subsequent conquest by the Normans, involve the enslavement of the Saxon people, much less their expulsion. Canute, a monarch even greater as statesman than as warrior, sought the fusion of the races under his sceptre, and while retaining his hold upon his hereditary dominions, always regarded England as the chief of his possessions, and himself as before all things King of England. The general conversion of the Northmen to Christianity had removed the chief barrier between the nations, and Canute's piety, which seems to have been no less sincere than politic, won the clergy to loyalty, and contributed to the peaceful establishment of his power. He appears to have been a real patron of ecclesiastical learning, and even more so of minstrelsy and poetry; he was, indeed, himself a poet, and the initial stanza of a lay composed by him has come down to us :—

Coin of Canute

> Merrily sang the monks in Ely
> When Cnut, King, rowed thereby :
> Row, my knights, near the land,
> And hear we these monkes' song.

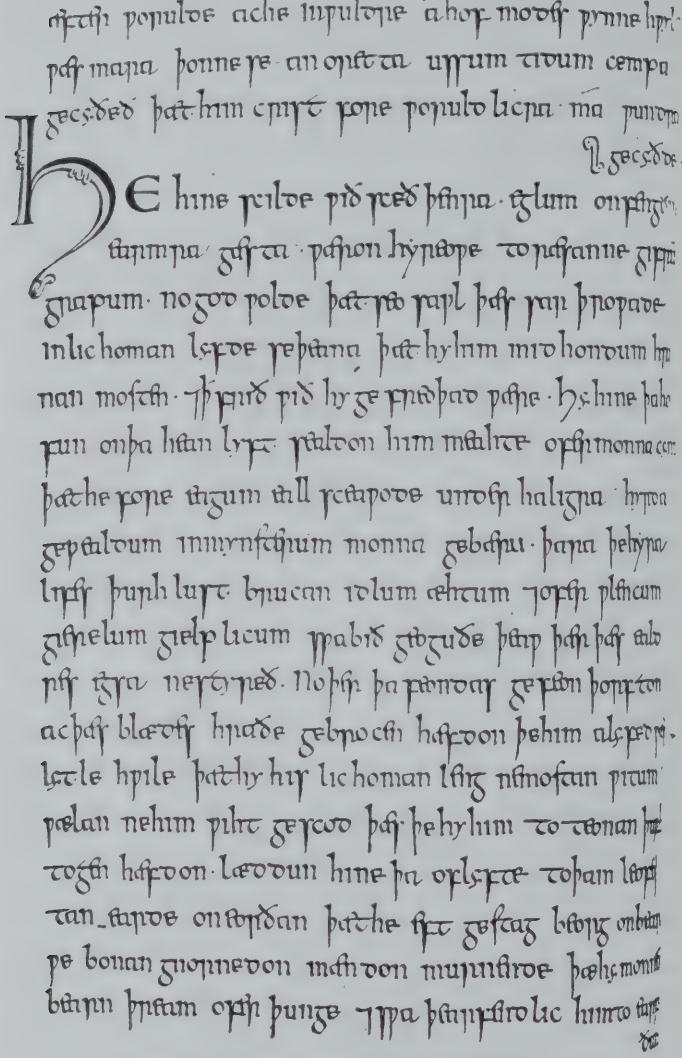
Saxon Chronicle

All the words of the original but two are good modern English. Notwithstanding Canute's literary tastes, his reign was unproductive of literature. One work of great value, indeed, was slowly growing up, which, beginning under Alfred, lasted on until Norman times. We must not wait until the Conquest before speaking of the Saxon Chronicle. It is an honourable distinction of England that, while the rude annals of other modern nations have, during the primitive stages of their culture, been usually written in Latin, she possesses her first national history in her

Eadgar offering up his Charter for the new Minster, Winchester, A.D. 966

British Museum, Cott. MS. tenth century

own tongue. Of earlier British historians who wrote in Latin, Gildas and Nennius were Celts, and Beda attempted no more than ecclesiastical history. Italian and Spanish, and probably even German, were in too rude and unformed a condition to have allowed of vernacular history, when, probably about 758, the foundations of such a history were laid in England by the beginning of the Saxon Chronicle. No thought of literary composition was present to the minds of the writers, whose simple part was at first to record the leading events of the past year upon a board, used in the monasteries for the purpose of indicating the proper day for keeping Easter. After a while the historical retrospect was carried farther back, and prolonged retrogressively to the days of Julius Cæsar by the aid of Beda and Orosius. The portion from A.D. 449 onwards receives the title of **The Saxon Chronicle.** Secular annalists also lent their aid, as is inferred from the comparative fulness of treatment accorded to Alfred's battles. The work was almost certainly encouraged by Alfred, and it is not improbable that he may have had some personal share in it; his archbishop, Plegmund, certainly had. The part from 893 to 897 more particularly is among the finest specimens of Anglo-Saxon prose. From this period down to 924 the Chronicle possesses high merit; after this date it becomes meagre, too clearly indicating that the general prosperity and



A Page from the Legend of St. Guthlac, in the Exeter MS.

advance towards national unity during the middle of the tenth century had not been attended by a simultaneous development of the intellectual life. The recognition, nevertheless, of the importance of the work is shown by the occurrence of MSS. from 900 to 1200. Seven are known, three of which have special importance; the Parker Book at Lambeth, from 891 to 1070; the Worcester Book to 1079; and the Peterborough Book in the Bodleian. Written in the Abbey of Peterborough in the early part of the twelfth century, and continued to the death of King Stephen in 1154, this MS. is by far the fullest. The diction of the latter part is frequently incorrect, showing the transition from Anglo-Saxon to Middle English.

Poems on historical events

The dryness of the redaction of the Chronicle of the tenth century is relieved by the introduction of four poems on contemporary events, for the preservation of which we are infinitely obliged to the scribes. Three, respectively composed on the expulsion of the Danes from certain Mercian towns (A.D. 942), on the coronation of Edgar (973), and his death (975), have no special poetical merit, but are interesting as expressions of national feeling. The other celebrates the battle of Brunanburh (937), when Athelstan and his brother overthrew the mixed host of Danes, Scots, and Irish who threatened the kingdom with destruction. This song of triumph, belonging to an order of literature popular with all nations since the days of Miriam and Deborah, is an excellent specimen of its class, full of fire and patriotic spirit, exultant in the victory, but not insulting to the foe. It has been frequently translated, and with marked ability by the present Lord Tennyson, whose version forms the basis of a freer rendering by his father. Our extract follows the less poetical version of Thorpe, in which alliteration is sacrificed to literality:

Departed then the Northmen
In their nailed barks,
The darts gory leaving
On the roaring sea
O'er the deep water
Dublin to seek,
Ireland once more
In mind abashed.
Likewise the brothers
Both together,
King and ætheling
Their country sought
In the West Saxons' land.
In war exulting
They left behind them
The carcasses to share
With pallid coat,
The swart raven
With hornèd neb,
And him of goodly coat,
The eagle white behind,
The carrion to devour;

The greedy war hawk,
And that grey beast,
The wolf in the weald.
No slaughter has been greater
In this island
Ever yet
Of folk laid low
Before this
By the sword's edges
From what book tells us,
Old chroniclers,
Since hither from the east
Angles and Saxons
Came to land,
O'er the broad seas
Britain sought,
Proud war-smiths,
The Welsh o'ercame,
Men for glory eager,
The country gained.

There is yet another fine example of Anglo-Saxon poetry of the tenth century in the poem on the death of Byrhtnoth, Ealdorman of Essex, who was killed in battle near Maldon while resisting the Danish invasion of 991. The poet describes with great spirit Byrhtnoth's refusal to buy the invaders off, his romantic but inauspicious generosity in allowing them to land that the fight may be on even terms, his death from many wounds in the front of the battle, the flight of some of his companions, the heroic devotion of others: "Byrthwold, the aged comrade, spoke as he grasped fast his shield and shook his ash: 'The spirit should be all the harder, the heart all the bolder, the courage should be the greater, the more our forces lessen; here lieth our prince cut down, the brave one, slain in the dust. May he ever mourn who thinketh now to turn from this battle-play. I am old in days, I will not go away, but I think to lie by my lord's side; I will lie by such a beloved warrior.'" Here the MS. is mutilated, and the poem breaks off.

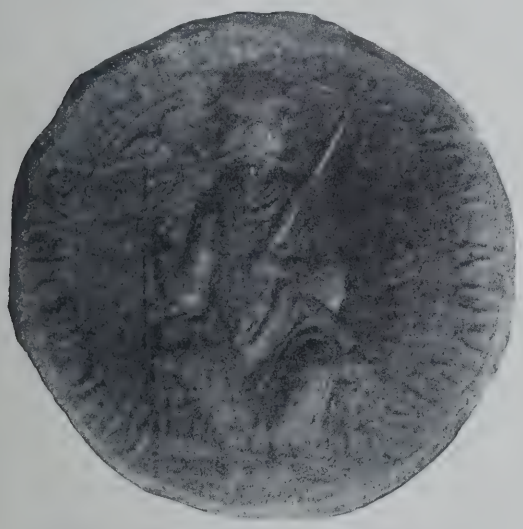
Little more poetry of this description is to be found in the remaining period of Anglo-Saxon literature, or, indeed, much literature of any kind. The national spirit needed renovation. As M. Jusserand justly remarks: "In spite of the efforts of Cynewulf, Alfred, Dunstan, and Aelfric, literature goes on repeating itself. Poems, histories, and sermons are conspicuous, now for their grandeur, now for the emotion that is in them; but their main qualities and main defects are very much alike; they give an impression of monotony. The same notes, not very numerous, are incessantly repeated. Literature is almost stationary, it does not move and develop. A graft is wanted."

Period of Edward the Confessor

The justice of these remarks is shown by the turn which affairs took under Edward the Confessor (1042–1066). Edward's partiality for the Normans among whom he had been educated angered his subjects, who

could not perceive that the powerful, and for the age highly civilised state which had grown up on the other side of the Channel must of necessity exercise a strong attractive influence upon one more torpid and backward. They were displeased when Edward for the first time affixed a seal to his charters, a custom borrowed from the Normans; they liked still less the chancellors, clerks, chaplains, legal and spiritual advisers whom he brought from beyond the sea. These were but the forerunners of the great intellectual change which must needs occur if England was ever to hold a foremost place among the nations, which must have come even if there never had been any material Norman Conquest. Such literary vitality as the age possessed asserted itself in the endeavour to naturalise a Norman form of literature, the romance. The Normans had not invented, probably at this time not even translated, the romances of Alexander and of Apollonius of Tyre, but they admired the class of literature of which these were types, and the translation into Anglo-Saxon of Alexander's supposititious letters to Aristotle, and of the probably Byzantine romance of Apollonius, which seems to have come into England through a Latin version, the earliest known copy of which belongs to the ninth or tenth century, were evidences of a new attraction beginning to be exercised upon the Anglo-Saxon mind, which might have produced considerable effect upon Anglo-Saxon literature but for the temporary abolition of that literature by the stroke of conquest. This convulsion occurring, as there is every reason to suppose, shortly after the Apollonius romance had been translated,

Seal of Edward the Confessor (obverse)



Seal of Edward the Confessor (reverse)

found and left it the sole representative of its class in Anglo-Saxon. One redeeming feature of the time should not remain unnoticed, that disposition to transcribe ancient writings which produced the priceless Exeter and Vercelli MSS.

Arrived as we are at the eve of a great crisis, it will not be uninstructive to cast a glance upon literature at the other side of the world. In the Far East is a chain of great islands not unlike the British Isles in their configuration, resembling them still more in their physical relation to the adjacent continent and the individuality of the race inhabiting them, and indebted for their civilisation to China, as England to Italy. While, however, intellectual England of the eleventh century is stagnation, intellectual Japan is all animation and brightness. When hardly one Englishwoman could write her name, the literature of eleventh-century Japan was mainly provided by ladies, who displayed qualities akin to those which were to characterise French epistolary and memoir literature in future ages. The comparison seems most mortifying in retrospect, but would have failed to move the contemporaries of Edward the Confessor, who had as little conception of the height from which European literature had descended, or of the possibilities of recovery, as of the dignity and preciousness of literature herself, apart from utility or amusement.

CHAPTER III

EARLY ENGLISH LITERATURE TO "PIERS PLOWMAN"

Transformation of English literature by the Norman Conquest

We have now accompanied English literature to the eve of the most violent and abrupt transformation ever wrought in that of any people. It is no uncommon circumstance for a literature to undergo profound modification through contact with another in presence of whose superior refinement the old hereditary forms are no longer able to hold their ground. Acquaintance with Greek literature thus remodelled the literature of Rome, and Italian forms of verse displaced the national metres of Portugal and Spain. But sweeping as these changes might be, they did not destroy the continuity of literary tradition. No one would think of separating the primitive stages of Latin and Spanish literature from the more recent, and making them the subject of distinct histories. With English literature it is otherwise, a gulf yawns at the Conquest, and although some stragglers cross the gap, like plants of one zone of vegetation straying into another, we soon become conscious that the conditions of soil and climate have undergone vast mutation, and that Anglo-Saxon literature as we have hitherto known it can exist no more. The case is wholly different from that of Latin borrowings from Greece. Greek literature was recommended solely by its superiority; had the Romans been incapable of perceiving this they could no more have been compelled to conform themselves to Hellenic models than the modern Germans can be compelled to adopt the Roman character in writing and printing. In England, however, new literary forms and a new literary language were established upon the same soil as the old, pressing upon and permeating these at every point, and leaving them no choice but to amalgamate with the innovators, or to be crushed out of existence.

It will have been observed that at the time of the Conquest the condition of Anglo-Saxon literature was by no means vigorous. It would indeed be an entire error to assert, as was at one time generally held, that the Danish invasion had reduced the people to barbarism, and that letters were virtually extinct among them. We have seen, on the contrary, that men of considerable learning were still to be found, and even that literature was evincing vitality by assimilating a new form, the romance. It is nevertheless true that

after the repulse of the great Danish invasions of the ninth century the national energy in intellectual things seemed impaired, and that such mental life as remained chiefly expended itself in ecclesiastical, rather than even theological controversies. It is but just to remark that this coincided with a general lowering of the intellectual level all over Europe, excepting the stationary Byzantine Empire and the then brilliant caliphate of Cordova, by neither of which could England be materially affected. Everywhere else the tenth century is an age of intellectual dearth, and even the few who impressed themselves upon their contemporaries as men of intellect, such as Dunstan and Gerbert, were rather distinguished as administrators or natural philosophers than as authors. A new type of character, meanwhile, was slowly coming to the birth in a corner of France, where, throughout the tenth century, the fusion of Frank, Celt, and Scandinavian was producing the Norman, like the ancient Viking a conqueror and a freebooter, but rather the propagator than the enemy of culture.

Had the Norman invasion of England failed, the animosity engendered between the nations would probably have long preserved Anglo-Saxon literature without material modification; but had it never been attempted the influence of Norman example upon England must still have been very considerable. We should have found Norman vocables, metres, ways of thought, gradually becoming naturalised by the influence of foreign visitors, courtiers, and ecclesiastics; and the effect upon our speech would have been far more disastrous than that which actually resulted from its temporary proscription as a vehicle of literature. Instead of that complete fusion between the Teutonic and Romance elements which now endows our language with such copiousness, and so happy a choice of alternative words, we should, as in the German of the seventeenth century, have had the new element uncouthly grafted on the old. French idioms would have little by little insinuated themselves, and the result would have been not renovation but corruption. The sharp and long-continued severance between the tongues, which could have been maintained in no other way than by one ranking as the language of the lord and the other as that of the serf, brought at last an alliance on equal terms, producing an amalgamation more complete than has often been effected in the case of languages so dissimilar in vocabulary and in genius.

We have now to follow the course of both languages until, alike in a linguistic and a literary point of view, they have become one. At the moment where we now find ourselves, the year of the Conquest (1066), they present a striking contrast. Each, indeed, has a great epic, Anglo-Saxon has *Beowulf*, Norman has, or is on the point of having, the *Chanson de Roland*. But the Anglo-Saxon poem, and hardly less the works of Caedmon, Cynewulf, and their circles, have almost fallen into oblivion, while Norman songs, fresh and full of vitality, are sung by the Norman soldiers on the eve of battle:

In the deep blue of eve,
Ere the twinkling of stars had begun,
Or the lark took his leave
Of the skies and the bright setting sun ;

I stood on the heights
Where the Norman encamped him of old,
With his barons and knights,
And their banners all broidered with gold.

Soon the ramparted ground
With a vision my fancy inspires,
And I hear the trump sound
As it marshalled our chivalry's sires.

By the Conqueror's side
There his minstrelsy sit harp in hand,
In pavilion wide,
As they chanted the song of Roland.

Over hauberk and helm
As the sun's setting splendour was thrown,
They looked over a realm,
And the morrow beheld it their own !

CAMPBELL.

So it continues, Norman literature throwing off a brilliant swarm of new productions, Anglo-Saxon literature apparently dead, and unquestionably dumb. Yet the stream is still flowing underground, and we must endeavour to trace its secret course, relinquishing the more showy productions of the Norman to the historian of French literature, except in so far as they react upon the literature of England, as we shall soon find to be the case.

Temporary eclipse of literature

The first effect wrought by the Conquest upon the English language was its proscription as the speech of men of rank. An entirely new aristocracy had supervened, which knew it only as the dialect of churls and boors. It was not, like the ancient British, driven away; there is no vestige of any attempt to suppress it; the Saxons were allowed to speak it among themselves as much as they pleased, and might no doubt have written in it too if they had desired. All inducement to composition in the vernacular, however, had for the time disappeared; the readers of books, always few, had been slain, or Normanised, or driven to dwell among illiterate serfs. The immediate consequence was a great impoverishment of the language. The words necessary for the purposes of practical life were retained, but the vocabularies of philosophy, art, and science, and the figurative language of poetry, fell into abeyance. It is said to be surprising at the present day how few words suffice an ordinary labourer, and speech hardly more copious served for a time the needs of the people of England. Hence the discontinuity which in spite of plausible cavils, average common-sense well expresses by employing the term Anglo-Saxon to denote our tongue in its pre-Norman period, reserving the title of English until the twelfth century. For

generations the language, in Aubrey's phrase, "delitesced," and when it came forth from its retirement a gap had been created between it and its Anglo-Saxon forerunner, marking the commencement of a new era. This would not have been the case had it remained the language of court and society; modifications would have gradually established themselves, and the influence of Norman literature might have been even more immediate and apparent, for the scanty Anglo-Saxon remains of the eleventh and twelfth centuries exhibit the English vocabulary as but little altered. The total suppression of Anglo-Saxon as a literary language left it free to shape itself as a popular speech, and it will be our task briefly to trace the vicissitudes it underwent until its reappearance as Early English.

Effects of the Conquest on the English language

We have already observed that if the Danes had effected a complete conquest of England in the ninth century, the consequence must have been a new language and a new literature. The male part of the Saxon population would have been slain or driven away, as the Britons had been before them, and the conquerors would have preserved their native speech. By repulsing the Danes Alfred preserved the English language, but in so doing he laid the foundation of a new English which he in no respect foresaw. Unable to expel the invaders from the country, he was compelled to assign to them a Mercian Danelagh, as it has been well called, which may be defined as consisting, in addition to the three maritime East Anglian counties, Lincoln, Norfolk, and Suffolk, of the inland shires of Derby, Rutland, Nottingham, Northampton, Bedfordshire, Huntingdonshire, and Cambridgeshire, with part of South and East Yorkshire, and of Warwickshire. The Danes nevertheless received this region as Alfred's vassals, and had to live in peace with the Saxons whom they found already there. The same result ensued as in Normandy; the intruders adopted the language of the original inhabitants. We have seen that the Blickling Homilies, written, as is to be supposed, in Norfolk, and intended for Norfolk auditors, are composed in Anglo-Saxon, though Anglo-Saxon of a more classic type than the congregation is likely to have generally understood. For, although the vocabulary of Anglo-Saxon was but slightly affected by the intermixture of populations, its structure became considerably modified. It lost much of its original character as an inflected language. It is always difficult to preserve in the mouths of the vulgar elaborate niceties of speech of which they do not see the use; but the difficulty is much increased when they are habitually associating with neighbours to whom these niceties present real obstacles. In such a case the tendencies to linguistic degradation, always potent, become irresistible, or at least the imperilled standard can only be preserved by the general diffusion of literature written in conformity with classical precepts. If every Saxon and every Dane had had a Bible in pure Saxon, and been able and accustomed to read it, the process of linguistic decay might have been arrested, but in the

absence of any such preservative, the dialect of the Mercian Danelagh, from which the New English was to spring, was probably at the date of the Conquest the most corrupt in England. All the time the Court at Winchester, the centre of refinement, was writing and speaking pure Wessex Saxon, careless what kind of dialect might be used in the Danelagh. The Conquest deprived this Wessex speech of every adventitious advantage, and when compelled to compete with other dialects its very purity proved a disqualification, while the rude simplicity of the Dano-Mercian gave this the same advantage as the freedom of the English tongue from inflections gives it at this day in the struggle for existence with more highly-organised languages. Other causes, to be afterwards adverted to, no doubt contributed to make the East-country dialect the direct ancestor of our modern English, a result deplorable in the estimation of the Anglo-Saxon scholar of that age, but practically most serviceable by facilitating the fusion of English and French speech, so necessary to the development of both.

Anglo-Saxon dialects

It must be remembered that the gradual progress of the East Mercian speech towards the position of a dominant dialect did not for a long time materially affect the other forms of the language. Of the Northumbrian of this period we have indeed no relics, owing to the devastations of William the Conqueror in Northern England, and the anarchy and general backwardness of the Scotch Lowlands. Of the Western speech, however, both in the Western counties and the West Midlands, we have considerable remains, and shall shortly, in the process of our history, have to notice one of very great importance, the epic of Layamon. For the present this form of speech may be defined as a classic Anglo-Saxon gradually yielding to dialectical corruptions, and may be characterised as something much nearer to German than the East Mercian, which on its side is much nearer to modern English. A few words selected from the Wessex version of the *Magnificat*, made in the twelfth century, will show how closely it adheres to the Teutonic stem to which modern German has clung while modern English has deviated :

Saxon.	Modern German.	Modern English.
Hælend.	Heiland.	Saviour.
Ofermode.	Uebermuthige.	Proud.
Warp.	Warf.	Cast.
Cniht.	Knecht.	Servant.

All these Teutonic words were no doubt fully intelligible to an Anglo-Saxon of the Eastern counties, and might have been used by him even at a later date, but it is doubtful whether the Latin and Norman words which were beginning to steal into the speech of Londoners would have been intelligible to a West Saxon. The latter, consequently, was at a disadvantage in the struggle for existence. For a time, however, any struggle was barely noticeable. No English dialect claimed any pre-eminence over another. If a scribe had to deal with a diction unfamiliar to him he altered it into that of his own locality, and hence we cannot always tell in what part of the country

an English text of the period was originally written. All the varying dialects of this transition period, down to about the middle of the thirteenth century, are grouped under the general denomination of Semi-Saxon. About 1120, nevertheless, we remark an evident transition into modern English, which has received the name of Middle English, to discriminate it alike from this and from the Old English or Anglo-Saxon which still prevailed in the western part of the country.

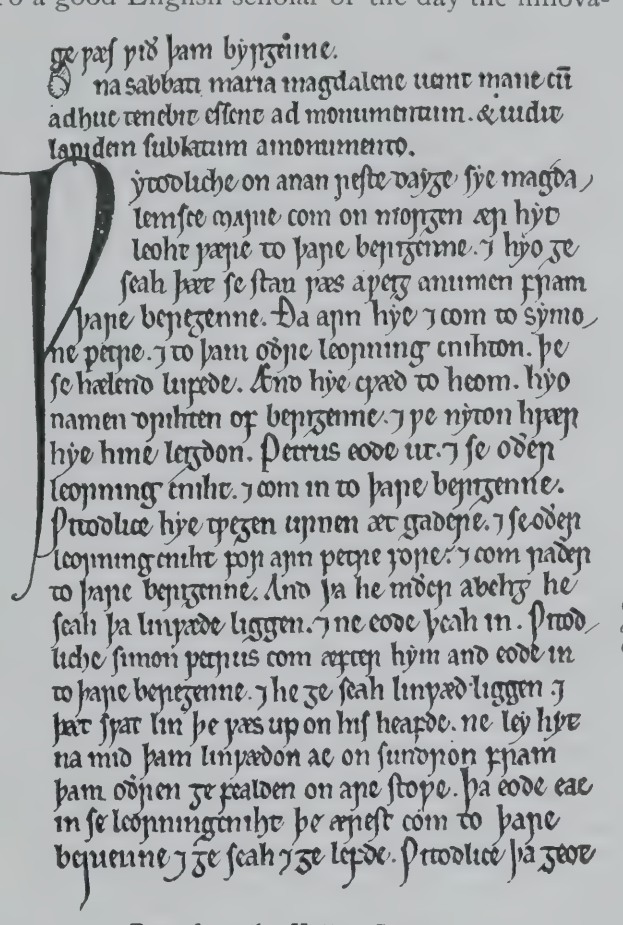
Anglo-Saxon and Semi-Saxon

The West Prospect, or Front, of the Cathedral Church of Peterborough

From Willis Browne's "Survey of Cathedrals," 1742

A date is a convenient thing, even if it cannot be made precisely accurate. The first literary manifestation of the Middle English, which had for more than a century been growing up in the Eastern Midlands, may be assigned to the year 1120, about which time the old Saxon Chronicle began to be rewritten at Peterborough. The Abbey of Peterborough had been burned down in 1116, and the monastery's copy of the Chronicle was consumed along with it. While restoring the Abbey, as it is seen to-day in the magnificent semblance of Peterborough Cathedral, the monks did not forget to restore the Chronicle. Copyists were sent to transcribe the versions of it preserved in other abbeys, and these, to the great moral discredit of the brethren, but the great gain of the philologist, were incorporated with a quantity of fictitious matter designed to promote the interests of the Abbey of Peterborough, and manufactured for that purpose within its walls. These apocrypha were drawn up in the dialect spoken by the monks themselves, and calmly set side by side with genuine documents professedly of the same periods, but entirely differing in dialect. We are thus enabled to contrast the Semi-Saxon of 1120–1130 with the Anglo-Saxon. It would be most interesting to set forth the most important changes in detail, but our business

is with literature, and with language only in so far as this illustrates literature. It must suffice to observe that every change, and particularly as regards the loss of inflections and the general physiognomy of words, tends to bring the language nearer to our modern speech, and to chasten the Teutonism so apparent in Anglo-Saxon. To a good English scholar of the day the innovations must have appeared symptoms of degeneracy, and such indeed they were. English would have been in danger of becoming a poor, rustic idiom, but for the regenerating infusion of Latin and French, whose time was not yet. But, little as they knew it, by depriving English of its elaborate structure, and rendering it grammatically the simplest of languages, the Midlanders were adapting it to become the language of the world.



Page from the Hatton Gospels
From the MS. in the Bodleian Library

Before passing to the two really important poems which respectively illustrate the Middle and the Southern English speech of the end of the twelfth century, we must notice a few interesting relics of earlier date. First among them is the continuation of the Saxon Chronicle during the reign of Stephen, written at Peterborough, and finished in 1154, the year of the accession of Henry the Second, and a great turning-point in English history. In these latter pages the Chronicler rises beyond the rank of an annalist, and shows something of the instinct of an historian in the selection of circumstances by which he depicts the nineteen years of wretchedness under Stephen. When, he says, the robber barons had taken everything they could out of the towns by exactions, they plundered and burned them, insomuch that "thou might'st go a whole day's journey and never shouldest thou find a man sitting in a town, nor the land tilled." To plough the soil was to plough the sea. If two men or three came riding to a town, all the township fled from them, concluding them to be robbers. The descriptions of castles

Continuation of Saxon Chronicle

and castellans would have fully justified Scott's picture of Torquilstone and Front-de-Bœuf, perhaps over-coloured for the time of Cœur de Lion, if it had been placed at this period. The climax of iniquity, in the monk's opinion, was that the miscreants robbed spiritual persons and burned churches, though it does not appear that they proceeded so far as to burn monasteries. "The bishops and learned men cursed them continually, but the effect thereof was nothing to them."

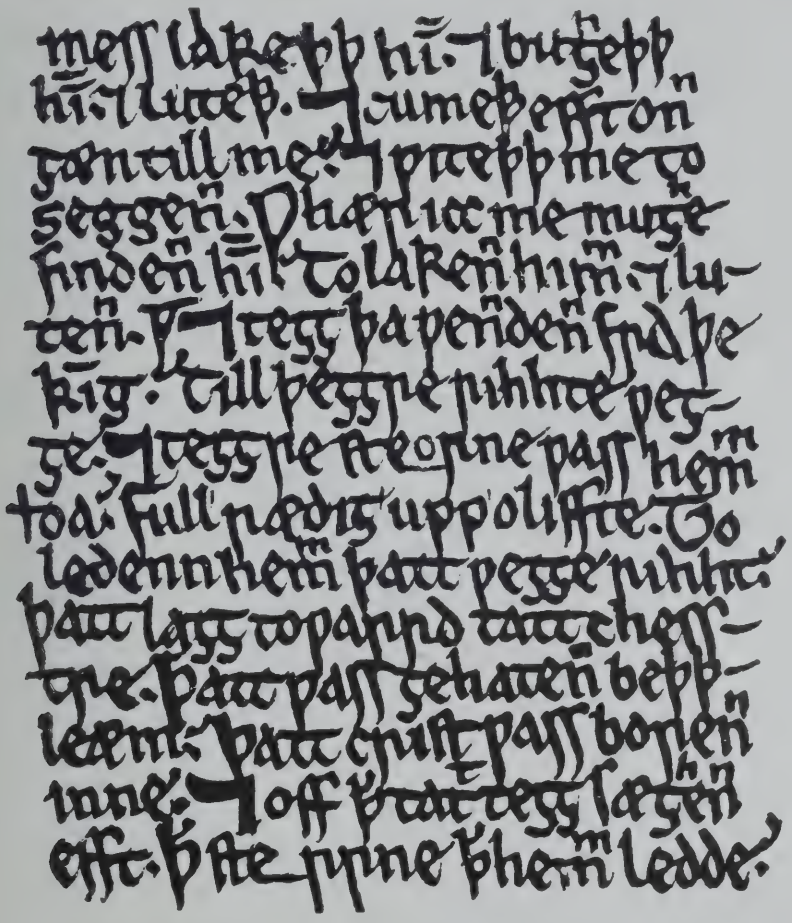
Ethical and religious writings

In the next place mention should be made of the so-called Proverbs of King Alfred, probably a composition of this period, but at all events expressed in its debased diction. They constitute a body of precepts ascribed to Alfred, and severally prefaced by "Thus said Alfred." They are in general sound but commonplace embodiments of morality and worldly wisdom, but possess a pathetic interest as lookings back to a better time, and testimonies to the great king's place in the hearts of his conquered and oppressed people. More important in a literary point of view is the appearance of rhyme as a competitor with alliteration, "the ancient long line," says Ten Brink, "in the midst of its transformation into the shortest couplet." This is a novelty, the Saxons previous to the Conquest employed rhyme only as an exercise of ingenuity. It was, moreover, a development in harmony with the period, for it appears in connection with homilies written about the middle of the century. One of these, generally known as *The Moral Poem*, is a sermon in verse, expressing an old man's remorse and apprehension on the retrospect of a wasted life, together with other topics familiar to mediæval preachers. Metrically it is of much importance for the new principles of accentuation which it develops; nor, as is shown by the modern rendering, is it devoid of poetical power:

> "I've spoken many idle words since I to speak was able;
> Full many deeds I've done that now seem most unprofitable;
> And almost all that I once liked is hateful now to me;
> Who follows overmuch his will, himself deceiveth he.
> I might in truth have better done had my ill-luck been less;
> Now that I would, I can no more for age and helplessness.
> Old age his footstep on me stole ere I his coming wist;
> I could not see before me for the dark smoke and mist.
> Laggards we are in doing good, in evil all too bold;
> Men stand in greater fear of man than of the Christ of old.
> Who doth not well the while he may repenting oft shall rue
> The day when men shall mow and reap what they erstwhile did strew."

Along with the more modern homilies come new recensions of Aelfric's sermons, expressed in the language of the time, but garbled to suit the doctrine of Transubstantiation which Norman and Italian ecclesiastics had introduced into the English Church. Somewhat later the versions of the Gospels made in Ethelred's time were converted into the English of the day, and, in memory of the presentation of the MSS. to the Bodleian by Viscount Hatton, are now known as the Hatton Gospels. Philologically they are, of course, exceedingly interesting, and are further memorable as the last vernacular

versions of the Bible, other than metrical paraphrases mixed up with comment, or mere psalms or canticles, which the priesthood allowed to be put forth until Wycliffe's revolt in the fourteenth century. About 1180 another set of homilies was composed, probably in Essex. These exhibit a transition or compromise between the South Saxon still spoken with many corruptions



From the MS. of the "Ormulum" (early thirteenth century)

Preserved in the Bodleian Library, Oxford

in London and the East Midland dialect; there are also many words derived from other sources, and many new meanings of words.

We must now proceed to the two great poems which were produced at the end of the eleventh or beginning of the twelfth century. The **Ormulum**, indeed, is great only in bulk, and by the injury of time is grievously impaired even in this respect. As a philological monument, nevertheless, it is of the highest importance. It and its companion, the far more interesting *Brut* of Layamon, lift themselves above the receding deluge of foreign conquest, public misery, and literary dearth and debase-

The "Ormulum"

ment, like the twin peaks of Parnassus after the flood of Deucalion. This, it must be feared, is nearly all the affinity discoverable between Parnassus and the *Ormulum*, the most edifying, the dullest, and in its original shape almost the biggest poem produced before the invention of printing. The intercession of Minerva, as is to be supposed, has preserved one-eighth of the hundred and sixty thousand lines so justly obnoxious to the wrath of Apollo, and enriched English literature with one of its most valuable philological monuments. When it is considered that the author not merely composed all this prodigious mass from a sense of duty, but most probably wrote it all out fairly with his own hand, it is impossible not to admire his stubborn tenacity, and to recognise in a bad poet some of the qualities which have made England a great country. There is also quite an Ozymandyan pathos in the minuteness of his directions to future scribes for the correct copying of a poem which probably was never transcribed by any one but himself.

Character and history of the book

Ormulum, so named "for that Orm wrought it," is a monument of the Mercian dialect, and the production of Orm or Ormin, an Augustinian monk, who probably lived in Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, or Northamptonshire. It is a metrical paraphrase of the Gospels of the year, accompanied by a commentary, also metrical, mainly derived from Beda and Pope Gregory. Though Orm does not say so, the work may have been undertaken as a protest against the ecclesiastical discouragement of vernacular versions of the Bible. It is at all events entirely in the traditional Anglo-Saxon spirit, and uninfluenced by the modern schools of theology. Whether on this account, or from sacerdotal opposition, or merely from its cumbrousness, it totally failed to realise its author's intention. The history of the only known MS. is curious. It must have slumbered in some monastic library until the Dissolution, when, after what adventures cannot be told, the ejected and mutilated remnant found its way in 1659 to the library of Mynheer Van Vliet at Breda, and was described in the sale catalogue of his collection (1666) as "an old Swedish or Gothic book on the Gospel." It was purchased by Franciscus Junius, the great restorer of Anglo-Saxon studies, and was bequeathed by him, together with his *Caedmon* and other manuscripts, to the Bodleian. Had it been lost, Orm and his work would never have been heard of. The MS. is described as "written on parchment on folio leaves, very long and narrow (averaging twenty inches by eight) in a very broad and rude hand, with many additions inserted on extra parchment scraps." These additions seem to indicate beyond doubt that the MS. is the author's autograph, or at least written under his eye. Twenty-seven leaves appear to be wanting. The tone of the author's dedication to his brother Walter appears to imply that he had rendered all the Gospels, and written all the commentaries; and, indeed, such a piece of metrical monotony, once set chiming, might well get finished, as Shelley says certain books get sold, mechanically. Whether, however, the whole was ever fairly transcribed is not quite certain.

Palæography of the "Ormulum"

The illustration we have here given from the *Ormulum* exhibits to the full the peculiarities of the "very broad and rude hand" spoken of above. Those of the manuscripts of other English books which we shall have occasion to illustrate, though less rude than this, are yet plain and undecorated, a clear proof that they were written for no wealthy book lovers. For comparison with them we give on pages 80 and 83 two pages from manuscripts written in England during the thirteenth century which illustrate the beauty of the ornamentation in which the best English work of that period rivalled that of France. A comparison of the two classes of manuscripts shows the humble position which the vernacular literature then occupied in England.

Its vocabulary

The poetical merits of Orm's work are entirely negative; it is to be commended for its simplicity. Philologically and metrically it is, after Layamon's *Brut*, the most important work of its time. The author stands chronologically on the border-line between pure English and Latinised speech; but so little is he affected by the influences even then working to transform the language that he barely uses half-a-dozen French words, and his few Latin phrases are ecclesiastical, and may be termed technical. "He is," says Mr. Kington-Oliphant, "the last of our English Makers who can be said to have drunk from the pure Teutonic well." Belonging to the Mercian Danelagh, he has many Scandinavian words, and many words now in use are found for the first time in him.

The *Ormulum* is also of importance metrically, from the consistency of the metrical structure. Orm's metre is substantially the same as that of the *Poema Morale*, a fifteen-syllable couplet, exact in rhythm, with something of rhyme and frequent alliteration, but no absolute system of either.

"Orm," says Mr. Gollancz, "was a purist in orthography as well as in vocabulary, and may fittingly be described as the first of English phoneticians. The *Ormulum* is perhaps the most valuable document we possess for the history of English sounds." His system of verse was probably adopted less on æsthetical grounds than with the purpose of impressing his teaching upon the memory of his hearers, for it must be remembered that he did not write for a reading public. The same circumstance explains much of his tedious repetition, and the simplicity and perspicuity of his syntax.

Layamon's "Brut"

A didactic motive cannot be alleged to account for the peculiarities of the other chief poetical production of the time, the *Brut* of **Layamon**, the work of a real poet, and a landmark in English literature. It is Layamon's especial significance to symbolise the reconciliation then beginning to take place between the three long divided races of Saxon, Celt, and Norman, which he does both in virtue of his own personality and of the origin and subject of his poem. As the name imports, the groundwork of the *Brut* is the fabulous history of the settlement in Britain of Brutus and his Trojans, and, although in fact much more, it is professedly a paraphrase of the *Brut* of the French poet Wace, author of the *Roman de Rou*. The French *Brut* was written in 1155. Here, then, we have the English resorting to their conquerors for a theme, and admitting the legendary history of their now

common country to be a subject of equal interest to both. But we must go farther back. Wace himself derived his tale from the Latin *Historia Britonum* of Geoffrey of Monmouth, written about 1147, which has been justly called "a cornerstone of romance." Geoffrey was neither Englishman nor Norman, but a Welshman, born in the then Cymric town of Monmouth, and whose native speech was Welsh. In his time Welsh was but slightly differentiated from Breton, and there seems reason to believe that, in so far as his history did not follow Nennius, it was derived from a book of Breton legends, now lost. Among them was the tale of the Trojan colonisation of Britain, which could not have arisen either among Celts or Teutons until they had come under Latin influence; but, once invented, was soon accepted as an unquestionable fact. The doctrine of Nature's abhorrence of a vacuum, whether true or false in physics, is an indubitable verity in the things of the mind. All men rejoiced to see the chaos of Britain's primeval history abolished by so excellent an invention, and a myth of yesterday was credited with as undoubting a faith as if it had come down from the Flood. Its moral and political effects were most salutary. "The *Historia Britonum*," says Geoffrey's biographer, "exercised a powerful influence in the unification of the people of England. The race animosities of Briton, Teuton, and Frenchman would probably have endured much longer than they did but for the legend of an origin common to them all."

Christ and the Doctors

From Royal MS. 2B VII. (in the British Museum) known as Queen Mary's Psalter. Early fourteenth century

Layamon's circumstances pointed him out as a man meet to enrich the literature of his people with this reconciling volume. He was an Englishman, and dwelt in England, but his home closely adjoined the Welsh border, being, as he says, "at Ernley, at a noble church on the Severn's bank; it seemed to him good to be there. Fast by Radestone, there he read book." That is, he was parish priest of Areley Regis, a North Worcestershire village upon the Severn, four miles south of Kidderminster, and within two or three miles of the Bishop of Worcester's residence at Hartlebury; and close to his abode the river is overhung by a cliff called Redstone to this day. *Layamon's circumstances*

As Layamon's situation was near the borderland between two races, so was his book compacted out of three literatures, besides a fourth which he does not expressly mention. Having conceived the idea of writing the legendary, by him held in good faith for the true, history of his country, he made a pilgrimage in quest of materials, and obtained "the English book made by Beda" (*i.e.* King Alfred's translation), "the Latin one of St. Albin and Austin" (no other, as would appear, than Beda's own Latin, in which he was assisted by Albinus, Abbot of Canterbury in his time), and Wace's *Brut d'Angleterre*. He was therefore acquainted with both Latin and French, as he speedily demonstrated :— *His method of composition*

Layamon leide theos boc,
& tha leaf wende.
he heom leofliche bi-heold,
lithe him beo drihten.
fetheren he nom mid fingren,
& fiede on boc-felle,
& tha sothe word
sette to-gadere :
& tha thre boc
thrumde to ane.

"Layamon laid before him these books, and turned over the leaves; lovingly he beheld them. May the Lord be merciful to him! Pen he took with fingers and wrote on book-skin, and the true words set together; and the three books compressed into one."

"We suspect," the *Quarterly Reviewer* adds, "that the art of *thrumming* three or more old books into one new one is by no means obsolete among *original* authors of the present day; though perhaps few of them would avow it so frankly as the good priest of Erneleye." In fact, Layamon does himself an injustice. He is not so much a compiler as he makes himself appear, nor even a translator so much as a paraphraser who puts new life and spirit into his original, which he at the same time greatly enriches and expands. His indebtedness is chiefly to Wace's *Brut*, and this is equally indebted to him. Before, however, discussing his character as a poet, it will be convenient to give the literary history of his work, which is very simple. The only historical event actually alluded to is the burning of Leicester in 1173, but the poet's language in speaking of Queen Eleanor, consort of Henry the Second, shows that he wrote after her death in 1204, while a hint that "Peter's pence" might *Probable date of Layamon's "Brut"*

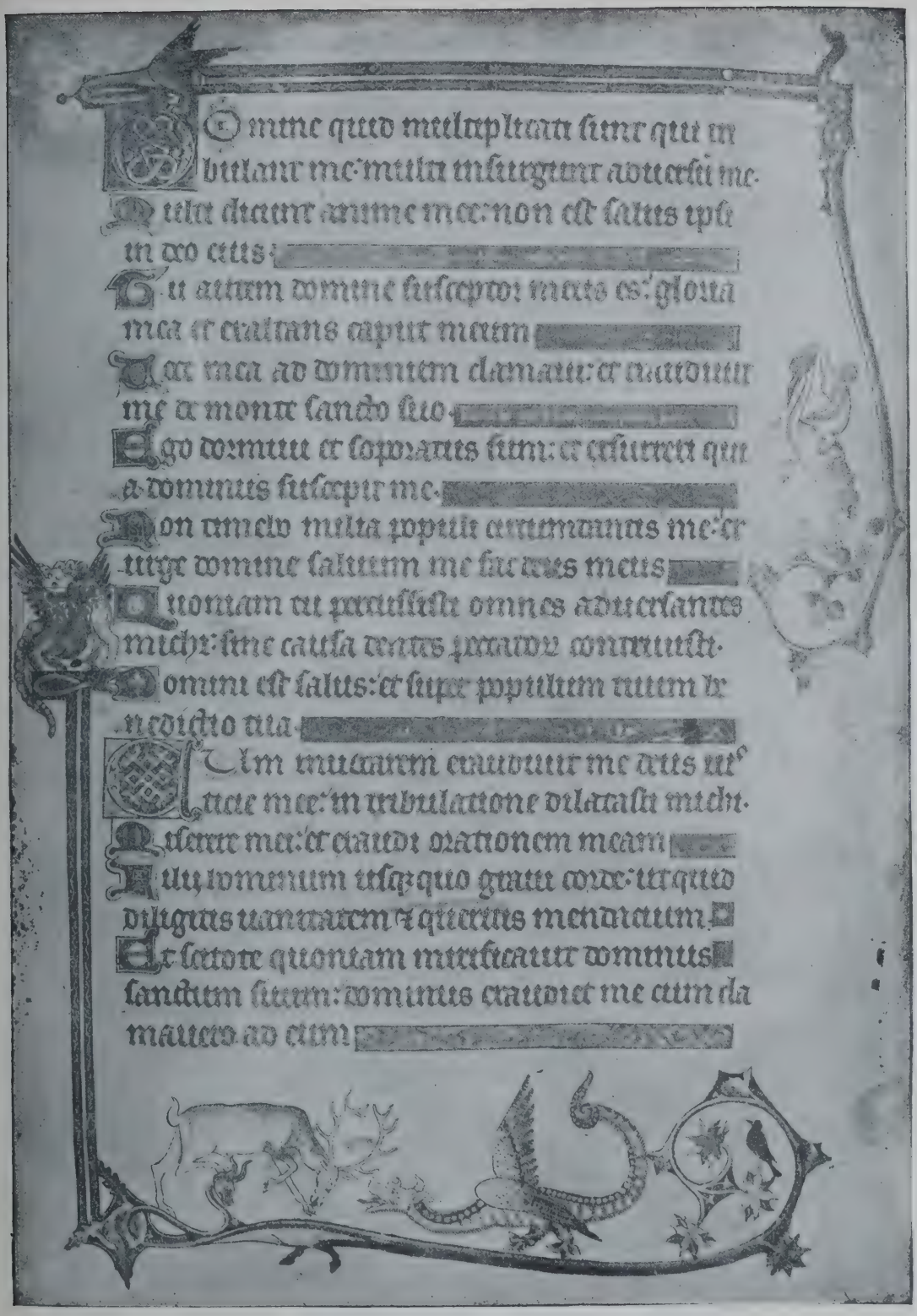
shortly cease to be paid is plausibly connected by his editor, Sir Frederic Madden, with an agitation against that impost in the following year. The *Brut* is thus very nearly contemporary with the *Ormulum*. It exists in two manuscripts written within fifty years of each other, the later of which reveals "numerous liberties by the more recent transcriber in transposing, altering, or abridging those passages which he did not like or could not understand." Both are reproduced in Sir Frederic Madden's edition (1847), at present the only edition, and more likely to be republished than superseded.

Celtic influences on Layamon

It is frequently found that after one race of men has expelled another, and appropriated its habitations, the remnants of the conquered people pass into the legendary poetry of the intruding tribe, and become objects of ideal admiration, sometimes even of superstitious awe. Such is now very generally deemed to have been the real origin of the folk-lore relating to the fairies, the good people of the hills. Such was in a measure the position of the Finns and Laplanders towards their Scandinavian supplanters; and in Ceylon and Madagascar at this day exist the remains of feeble, primitive races, venerated by the descendants of those by whom their ancestors were dispossessed. So in the England of the twelfth century we perceive traces of a Celtic revival. The Norman poet Wace resorts for his British epic to a Celtic source, and renders Geoffrey of Monmouth. As a native of Jersey, he may well have boasted some strain of Celtic blood, but his acquaintance with Celtic traditions can hardly have been other than merely literary. Layamon, on the other hand, though a perfect Saxon, as evinced by the name of his father, Leofenath, which is found in Herefordshire as early as the tenth century, had been born and brought up in a semi-Celtic atmosphere. He is consequently more Celtic than his original, and makes large additions to Wace's comparatively arid narrative, partly from Geoffrey of Monmouth, partly, as there is every reason to think, from popular traditions current in Wales and on the Welsh border. Others are Anglo-Saxon; others, such as that of the wondrous smith who forges Arthur's armour, descend from the earliest ages of Indo-European mythology. Sir Frederic Madden enumerates between thirty and forty remarkable episodes in Layamon not to be found in Wace. Two of the most interesting of his Celtic traditions occur neither in Wace nor Geoffrey; the dream which, warning Arthur of Modred's treachery, recalls him from Gaul to Britain as he is meditating the conquest of Rome; and his conveyance by the Fairy Queen to the isle of Avalon, so marvellously exalted in our own time by the genius of Tennyson.

Layamon's merits as a poet

It would have sufficed for the fame of Layamon had he been no more than the first minstrel to celebrate Arthur in English song, but his own pretensions as a poet are by no means inconsiderable. He is everywhere vigorous and graphic, and improves upon his predecessor Wace alike by his additions and expansions, and by his more spirited handling of the subjects common to both. Arthur's defiance of the Danish invader Colgrim, in Sir Frederic Madden's prose version, is a good specimen of his style. Colgrim and his brother Baldulf, it must be understood, have retreated to "the hill that



A Thirteenth-Century Psalter

From Add. MS. 24,686 (in the British Museum), probably executed for Alphonso, son of Edward I., on his contemplated marriage with Margaret, daughter of Florentius, Count of Holland

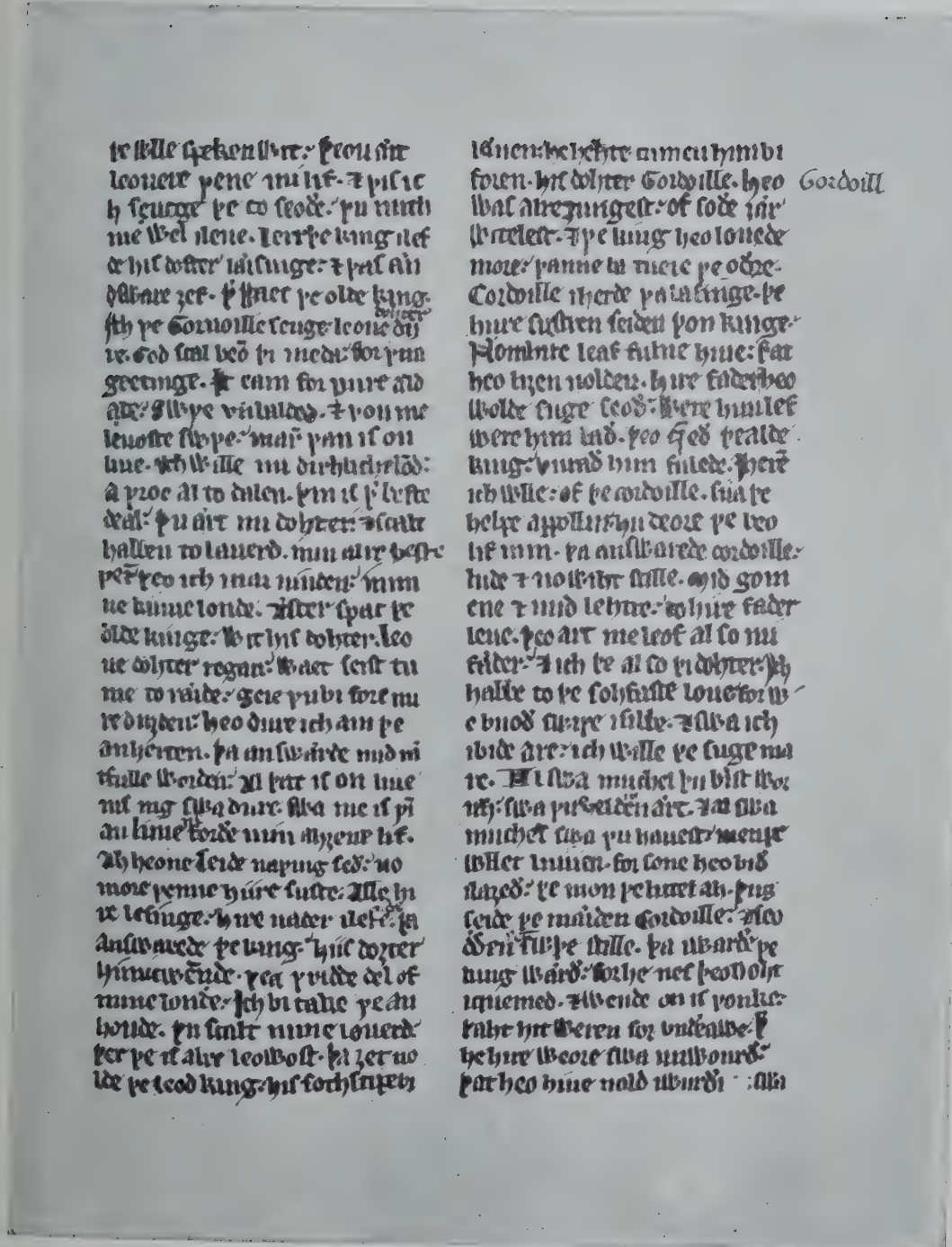
standeth over Bath," after a defeat which has heaped the channel of the Avon from bank to bank with slain :—

When Arthur saw, noblest of kings, where Colgrim stood, and eke battle wrought, then called the king keenly loud: "My bold thanes, advance to the hill. For yesterday was Colgrim of men keenest, but now it is to him as to the goat,[1] where he guards the hill; high upon the hill he fighteth with horns, when the wild wolf approacheth toward him. Though the wolf were alone without any herd, and there were five hundred goats, the wolf to them goeth, and all them biteth. So will I now to-day Colgrim destroy; I am the wolf and he is the goat; the man shall die." Yet called Arthur, noblest of kings. "Yesterday was Baldulf of all knights boldest, but now he standeth on the hill and beholdeth the Avon, how the steel fishes lie in the stream. Armed with sword, their life is destroyed; their scales float like gold-drest shields; there float their fins, as if it were spears. There are marvellous things come to this land, such beasts on the hill, such fishes in the stream!"

Layamon's metre and dialect

This is quite in the spirit of the Anglo-Saxon lay of Brunnanburh, and proves that our priest might well have been a skald if he had flourished at a fitting period, while the *Brut* might have been no unworthy pendant to the *Faery Queen* could the author have sat at the feet of Spenser. His defects are not his own, but arise from the uncouthness of his language and the want of flexibility in his metre. He seems to have striven to cure the latter, partly by the liberties which he takes with the strict rules of alliteration, partly by mingling rhyming couplets with his alliterative verse. These are inserted so capriciously that it is difficult to estimate their proportion to the whole, but the alliterative lines are by far the more numerous. Even the rhyming couplets are shown by Dr. Guest to be "founded on the models of accentuated Anglo-Saxon rhythms of four, five, six, or seven accents." Compared even with *Piers Plowman* a century and a half later, Layamon appears rhythmically lax, and as though he were feeling after some more melodious and complicated system of versification than, until Provence and Italy had shown the way, English poetry was able to attain. His metrical structure is compared by Professor Courthope to "those debased forms of architecture in which the leading external features are reproduced long after the reasons for their invention have been forgotten." Layamon's dialect is of the Southern or Wessex type, not of the Middle English, and shows how much more Teutonic our language would have been had the West-country form become dominant. It was most probably originally, and may be in the versions that have come down to us, that of North Worcestershire, where the Wessex dialect seems to have displaced the Mercian after the union of the kingdoms. The evident corruption, however, of the more recent MS. reminds us that we do not know where the older one was written, or what dialectical changes may have been introduced by the transcriber. Many words, meanings, and forms of speech are novel; there are many Scandinavian words; but in the two texts together not more than ninety French, though Layamon is para-

[1] The introduction of goats instead of sheep seems characteristically Celtic.



From Layamon's Brut.

[*Cottonian MS., Calig. A. ix., British Museum.*]

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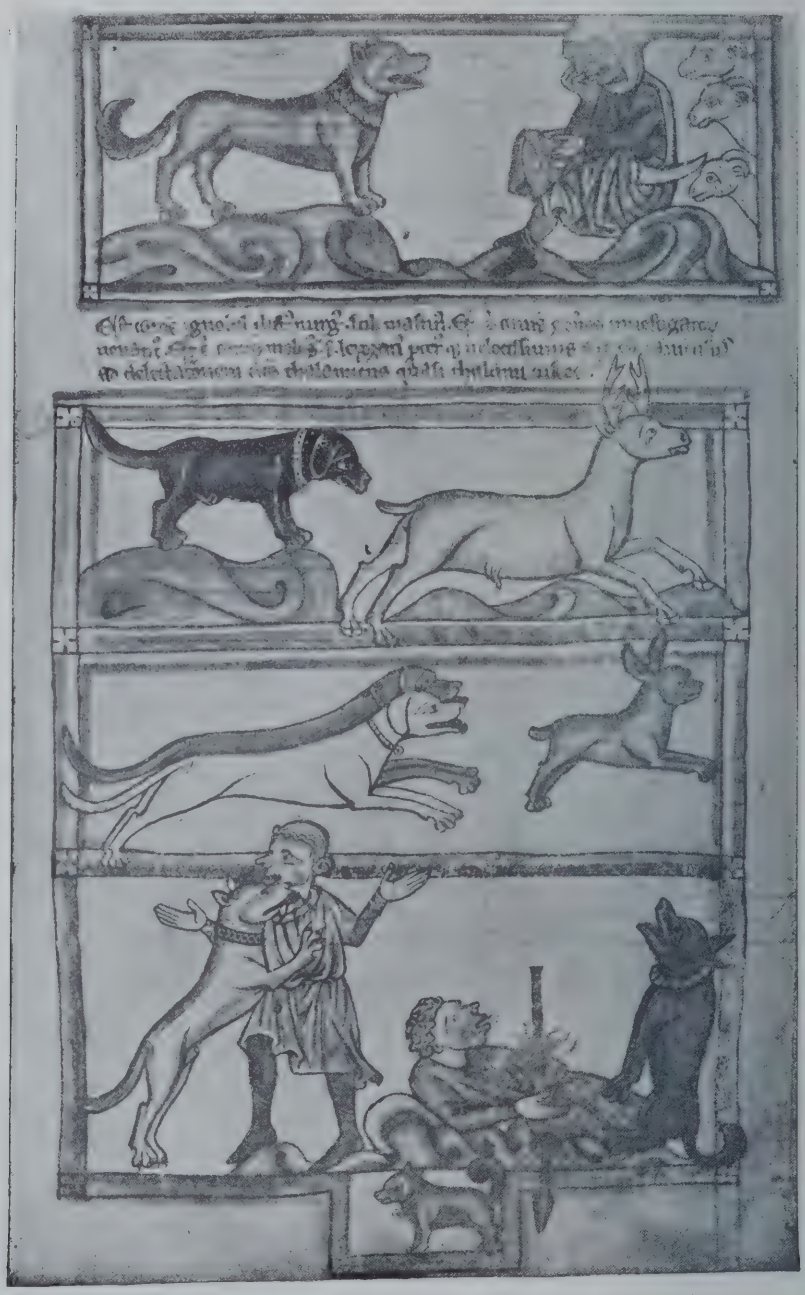
phrasing a French original. It is probable, however, that the scholarly priest was something of a purist, and that his language is more archaic than that habitually used by him and his neighbours in daily life. The more recent of the two MSS. drops several of his words which had probably become obsolete, and is freer in the use of French terms.

Currents of English and of Norman literature

The bare possibility of such a poem as Layamon's being written in English showed that the language had escaped the perils which had threatened to degrade it to a mere dialect, and that its full attainment of rank as a cultured speech could only be a question of time. It still, however, lacked a standard of form, broken up as it was into a number of dialects, capable of classification under the three leading divisions of Northern, Midland, and Southern, none of which could claim any better right than the others to be regarded as the speech of cultivated society. The character of politeness could not, indeed, belong to a tongue of which the leaders of social and political life were or might well be ignorant; but these had failed or neglected to impose their more cultivated form of speech upon the people. It is difficult to determine what the result might have been had William the Conqueror and his successors deliberately bent themselves to compel Englishmen to speak French. Most fortunately they made no such attempt, and by the period we have reached it was too late. Up to this date the English tongue had remained surprisingly unaffected by Norman influences, but the time was at hand when, without ceasing to be national, she could appropriate the verbal wealth of her competitor, and when the latter was to drift on the irresistible stream of events into the euthanasia of incorporation as a subordinate element into the language which, perhaps, it might have supplanted. For the present two great currents are discernible in the literary life of England, a purely English and a Norman. The latter expresses itself chiefly in French and Latin, but an intermediate literature springs up consisting chiefly of English paraphrases or adaptations of French romances, and occasionally of devotional works. Speaking broadly, the character of the English literature which derives from Norman sources may be described as secular, gay, bright, and even in its graver forms occupied with the things of the world; while the purely English strain of literature is for the most part austere and religious. One might be defined as pre-eminently the literature of the people, the other of the courtier and the scholar. It will be convenient to disregard strictly chronological considerations, and to carry on the history of the more purely English literature until its culmination in *Piers Plowman*; returning in a subsequent chapter to the Norman element, and following it until its fusion with the English in the fourteenth century. This will also be the place to notice the growth of the University studies which so powerfully influenced literature.

The period from about 1210 to about 1280 was in general a barren one, partly from the foreign proclivities of the court, partly from the development of the University system and the general tendency of scholars to interest themselves in subjects which could be treated only in Latin. Somewhat

later than Layamon's *Brut* were written by different anonymous authors a metrical *Bestiary* or edifying allegories of certain animals, founded on a



Page from a Bestiary Book preserved in the British Museum

Latin work by an Italian archbishop named Tebaldo, and metrical paraphrases of Genesis and Exodus. All appear to have been written in East

Anglia. "The *Bestiary* contains the germ of the octo-syllabic measure," and the most remarkable features of the Biblical paraphrases are the extent to which commentators are made use of, and the evident traces of French influence on the light brisk rhymed measures employed by the poet. Alike in dialect and metrical form, we feel ourselves approaching modern English :—

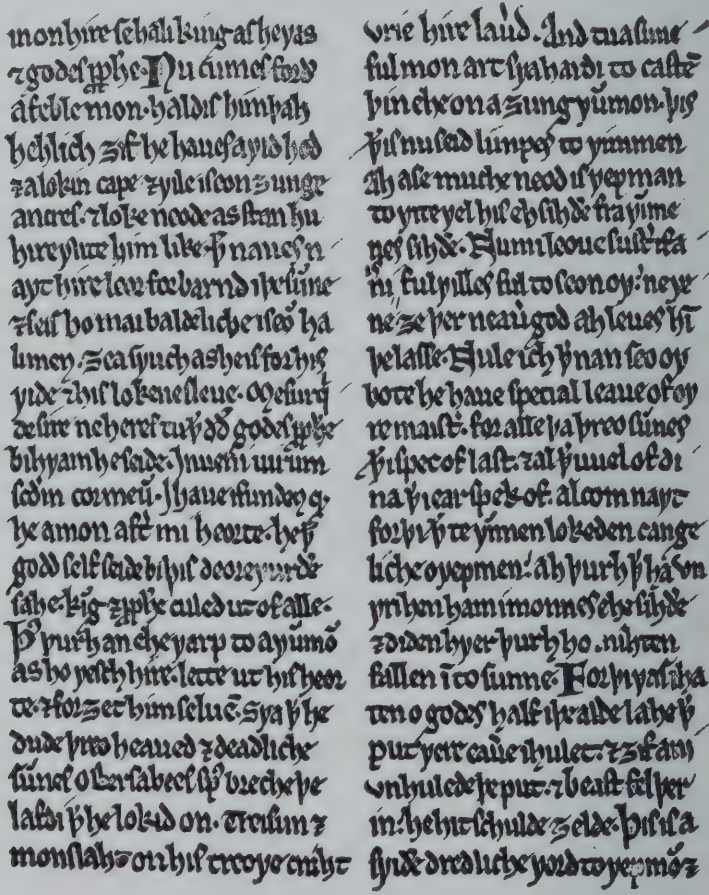
> "Do wex a flod this werlde wid-hin.
> and overflonged men and deres kin
> withuten Noe and hise thre sunen,
> Sem, Cam, Japhet, if we rigt munen
> and here foure wifes woren hem with ;
> thise hadden in de arche grith.
> That arche was a feteles good,
> set and limed agen the flood ;
> thre hundred elne was it long,
> nailed and sperd, thig and strong."

This brief extract suffices to indicate how far since the thirteenth century our language has drifted from its original Teutonic affinities. Every word presenting any difficulty, except *grith* (*peace*), can be interpreted from modern German. *Do* is *da*, *deres* is *Thier*, *munen* is *meinen*, *feteles* is *Fass*, *sperd* is *sperren*. The last occurs in *Troilus and Cressida*, "sperr up the sons of Troy."

Amalgamation of Saxon and Norman

While these pieces were being composed in East Anglia, the legends of St. Margaret, St. Juliana, and St. Catherine, and *The Hali Meidenhed*, an alliterative homily in praise of virginity, were written in the South of England. "Their diction, with its touch of enthusiasm," Ten Brink says, "contains much that recalls the good old times of poetry." They are, nevertheless, inferior in interest to a prose work, **The Ancren Riwle** (Anchorites' Rule), written in Dorsetshire in the thirteenth century : "that piece," says Mr. Kington-Oliphant, "which, more than anything else written outside the Danelagh, has influenced our standard English." "*The Ancren Riwle*," he adds, "is the forerunner of a wondrous change in our speech." It was written for three Cistercian nuns at Tarrant Keinston on the Stour, between Wimborne and Blandford, and has been plausibly attributed to Richard Poore, Bishop of Salisbury, by whom the nunnery had been founded. It is consequently in South English speech, but has a much larger proportion of French and Latin words than any previous English book ; and this is no mere peculiarity arising from the idiosyncrasy of the author, but continues to be the case throughout the thirteenth century. Not merely, as was inevitable, are foreign words introduced to express new objects and new ideas, but they come into competition with English vocables already existing, and establish themselves by their side, or oust them altogether. The influence of the Court, now habitually resident in England, no doubt counted for much, and in an even greater degree that of the preaching friars who, called into activity by those two great lights of their time, St. Francis of Assisi and St. Dominic, swarmed over England during the latter half of the thirteenth

century, and, mingling tales and worldly wisdom with their religious exhortations, fulfilled in some measure the office of a free press. Their language was necessarily more Gallicised and Latinised than that of the common people, and words employed by them easily found their way into the popular speech. In the main, however, this blending of the languages must be regarded, partly as the necessary consequence of the Anglo-Saxon element



From "The Ancren Riwle" (thirteenth century)

British Museum, Cotton. MS. D. 18

having lost the faculty of framing new words, partly as the visible representation of an event of momentous importance, the reconciliation of the English and Norman peoples which may be held to date from the Great Charter of 1215. Such a reconciliation necessarily implied an amalgamation of race, and amalgamation of race implied amalgamation of language. French continued to be the language of the Law Courts until 1362, and all official documents for a long time to come were written either in French or in Latin. But when in 1258 Henry the Third found it needful to address the entire body of the people, alternative copies of his proclamation were drawn

mge to alle hise halde ilaȝde and ileȝlede on Burcendon schyr
at laȝnes fell an þe Burcuche. habbeþ idon and schulle
ȝeft and iuestnde in alle þinge abuten ande. hud þe hoaten
de and þeon to mabren þus þan to foren ueder uædes mey
de to done and to fraugen. hud noan ne nime of laȝnene af
t alle þe creatte heom healden deadliche sfoan. hud so þe
of sellen ut Lunden. þane Oxeneȝe dæȝ. on ȝe ȝeonþe
on ȝ ant bur! bisscop of Cantelaȝ. Bischop on Winchest.
ngtencloand. Eorl of Saneȝe. Will of ffort eorlan tubem.
re mose.

Dated in Worcester [illegible]
missa ad Magnas [illegible]
Regis

40:

v Hoyd þurs godes fulcume þurg on Engleneloande. Þoruerd on Irlande. Cnut on Norrom on Sparnem and coal on Alnaß. Send igreoinge to alle hise halde ilaȝde and ileȝlede on Sunceneden. þing
þæt hreon stellæd alle þæt stillen and cinne þæt hit hire rædesmen alle. oþer þe moȝe deȝ of heom þæt beoȝ icholen þurg us and þurg þæt loandes folc an hire kineriche. habbeþ iden and istulden in þe wlafresse of gode and on hire treouþe for þe sibbe of þe loande þurg þe bidde we him to foren sende rædesmen. heo stedefæstest and ilæstende in alle þinge abuten ende. and þe heaten
alle hire treouþe in þe treouþe þæt heo him ofæren. þæt heo stedefæstliche healden and fulfremen to fulgin and to wenen þe us cuemest þæt heon muȝe ȝedon and heon to maȝen þurg han to foren sende rædesmen
oþer þurg þe moȝe del of heom alswo alse hit us biforen sæid. and hit þe oþer helpe þæt he to done bi sim ilche oþe ȝeneȝ alle men. buten for to done and to fonigen. and noȝn ne nime of loande ne of
eȝte. whoso þurg his bidde muȝe beon ilet oþer ut ersæd on enie wise. and ȝif enig oþer enie cumen her ongenes. þe stillen and hraðen þæt alle hire treouþe heom healden deadliche of heom. and so þæt
the stillen þæt his heo stedefæst and læstende. we senden ȝew his writ open isemed mid hire seel. to halden a mangest ȝew me hond. witnesse of sibben þe Lunden. þane Exetrenche dai. on þe ȝeonde
of October in þe eilfte and fowertenþe ȝeare of hire cruninge. and his þes writ on þeoren hire ilchenes rædesmen. Dunchat bischop on þe tun burh. Walt of Cantelaß. Bischop on Wrecheste.
Sim of Wintefort. Eail on Leirchestr. Hue of Chid eail on Chaltheistr. and on Hurefort. Rog Bigod eail on Northfolke and marescal on Engleneloande. Peres of Pameie. Will of Hastinges. Will of Hastinges eail an Arbem.
Seh of Plesseiz eail on Warwik. Seh Geffrei sune. Pers of Wintefort. Hue of Grey. Rog of Norreiz. Simon of Wachet and þeoren ohre mose.
And al on so ilche wordes ispend mi to writhe ofre þare ouer al þare kineriche on Engleneloande. and et in eal Irelonde.

Facsimile of the Oxford Provision
The First Exactly-dated English Production

up in English, and survive to show that, however French or Latin might have encroached upon it for the terms of foreign culture, or the expression of the more refined shades of emotion, it was still possible, and was deemed preferable, to write on the practical affairs of life in English of almost absolute purity, more archaic, indeed, than the ordinary speech. The document, which is the first English production with an exact date, might well be regarded as a type of Middle English, standing almost precisely half-way between Anglo-Saxon and our modern speech, were it not almost certain that its diction is designedly antiquated, and that the English of the period approached more nearly to the language of modern times.

The Ancren Riwle is a work of great literary merit, and in spite of its linguistic innovations, most of which have established themselves, well deserves to be described as "one of the most perfect models of simple eloquent prose in our language." It is quite in the spirit of the best Continental devotional works of the period, and has an unction implying a warm personal relation between the writer and the nuns for whom it was composed.

The poetry of the time principally belongs to the class of chivalric and romantic song reserved for the next chapter. There is nevertheless a remarkable exception in the *Luve Ron* (love-song) of **Thomas de Hales,** a Franciscan friar, written about the middle of the thirteenth century at the request of a nun. Its theme is the mystic union of the soul with Christ: it is, therefore, akin in spirit to *The Ancren Riwle* and similar compositions, and has been truly described as "a contemplative lyric of the simplest, noblest mould." The reflections are such as are common to all who have in all ages pleaded for the higher life under whatsoever form, and deplored the frailty and transitoriness of man's earthly estate. Two stanzas on the latter theme, as expressed in a modernised version, might almost pass for Villon's :—

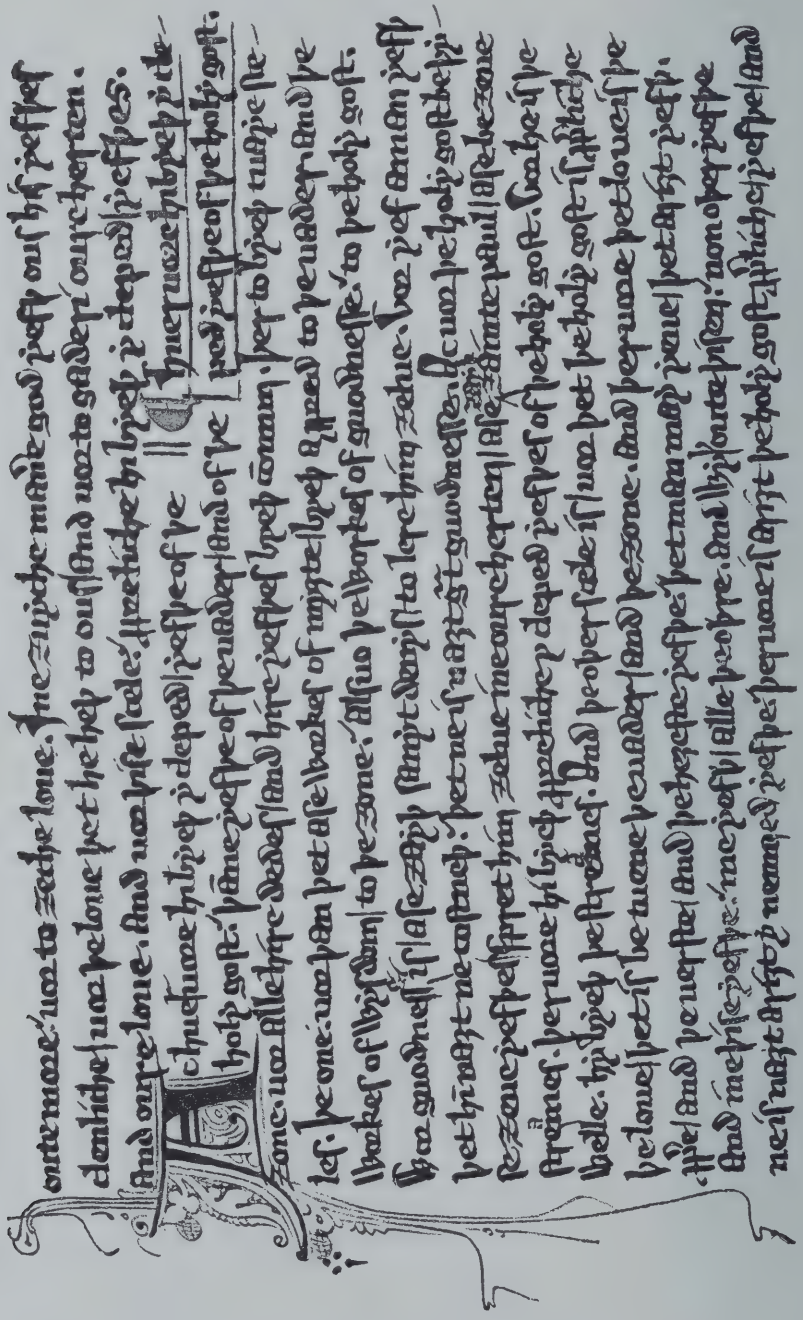
"Paris and Helen, where are they,
Fairest in beauty, bright to view?
Amadas, Tristrem, Ideine, yea
Isold, that lived with love so true?
And Cæsar, rich in power and sway,
Hector the strong, with might to do?
All glided from earth's realm away,
Like shaft that from the bow-string flew.

It is as if they ne'er were here,
Their wondrous woes have been a-told,
That it is sorrow but to hear:
How anguish killed them sevenfold,
And how with dole their lives were drear;
Now is their heat all turned to cold.
Thus this world gives false hope, false fear;
A fool, who in her strength is bold."

Robert Mannyng

The political poetry which began to appear about this time, though strictly national, will be better considered along with lyrical poetry in general.

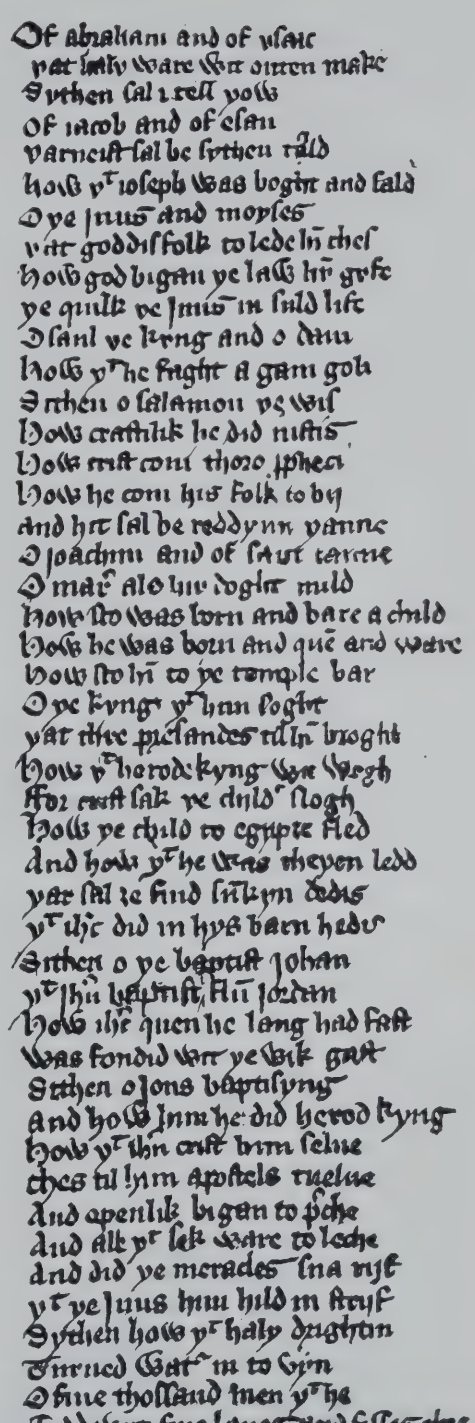
Robert of Gloucester also belongs to the next section, and we find little to detain us until we arrive at the religious prose of the fourteenth century.



From the "Ayenbite of Inwyt" (A.D. 1340)
British Museum, Arundel MS. 57

The *Ayenbite of Inwit* (remorse of conscience), although a translation from the French, demands inclusion in the specifically English department of our literature as a unique and invaluable specimen of the Kentish dialect.

The translator, a monk at Canterbury, has considerately dated his work on the festival of SS. Simon and Jude, 1341. Much more important is the *Handlynge Synne*, a translation from the French of William de Wadington, by **Robert Mannyng**, of Bourne, in Lincolnshire, whence he is frequently called **Robert de Brunne**. He was a brother of the Gilbertine Order, and flourished under all the three Edwards. Mannyng was a man of much independence of mind, and is very free in his treatment of his original. He writes in short metre; his work may be described in general as a collection of stories illustrating the offences which may be committed under the sway of each of the seven deadly sins, and is valuable as a picture of the manners of the time, although, of course, the chief merit in this respect belongs to the original writer. Philologically, the English version is of great interest. "Since Ormin," says Mr. Kington-Oliphant, "no Englishman has shown the change in our own tongue so strikingly as Robert of Brunne. Many of our writers had fastened an English ending to a foreign root; but no Englishman had fastened a French ending to an English root, as *bondage;* and none had employed a French active participle instead of an English preposition, as "*passing* all things. In his seventy lines on Confirmation he employs French words for at least one third of his nouns, verbs and adverbs; the same proportion that was afterwards to be used in the collects of the English Prayer-book, as also by Addison." We shall speak hereafter of



From the MS. of "Cursor Mundi"
British Museum, Vespasian, A. 3

Mannyng as a metrical historian. His popularity must have helped to bring the East Midland dialect into general literary use.

"Cursor Mundi"

About 1320, while Mannyng was yet writing, appeared the *Cursor Mundi* (*Cursor o Werld*) a metrical paraphrase of Scripture history intermingled with numerous ecclesiastical legends. It is an extensive work on a comprehensive plan. The anonymous author, a man of an ascetic cast of mind, desired to set up a rival to the secular poetry of his time, and devoted himself to the celebration of the Virgin Mary, who, though not prominent in the poem, is represented as the mainspring of the economy of redemption; much in the same way as Elizabeth pervades the *Faery Queen* as the unseen yet ever-present Gloriana. The work possesses considerable poetical merit, and attained great popularity. The original dialect is Northumbrian, but the poem, though consisting of no less than 25,000 lines, was transcribed with modifications in other parts of England, and appears to have exerted considerable influence upon Wycliffe and upon Langland.

Life and works of Richard Rolle

Perhaps the most popular author of his day was **Richard Rolle,** better known from the place of his abode as **Richard de Hampole,** but in his case literary merit was reinforced by the repute of sanctity. He was born about 1290 at Thornton, in Yorkshire, and while pursuing a successful career as a student at Oxford, came under religious impressions which induced him, at the age of nineteen, to retire into a hermitage in a wood near his father's house. Fearing to be placed under restraint, he became an itinerant preacher, and discoursed with such effect at Dalton, near Rotherham, that the squire of the place established him in a retreat, where he remained for some years absorbed in religious contemplation. After another period of wandering he settled at Hampole, near Doncaster, where his cell became a place of resort for the devout. He died in 1349 in the odour of sanctity, but was never canonised, perhaps on account of the popularity of his writings among the Lollards. He wrote much both in Latin and English, and preceded Wycliffe as a translator or rather paraphraser of several portions of Scripture, of which only his version of the Psalms and Canticles have yet been printed. The two most considerable of his Latin treatises, *De Emendatione Vitae* and *De Incendio Amoris*, were translated into English by Richard Misyn in 1434 and 1435. The most important of his English works, *The Pricke of Conscience*, is in rhyme, and extends to seven books. It is entirely ascetic in character, a perfect representation of the mediæval view of life as beheld from the cloister, free from every symptom of the approaching renaissance except for the author's acquaintance with many classical writers, but is highly important in a philological point of view from the insight which it affords into the character of our language in the early fourteenth century, by the comparison of the original Northumbrian of the Yorkshire hermit with the Southern English dialects into which it has been transmuted by copyists.

Rolle was certainly a most remarkable man, and as an author fills the

most conspicuous place between Layamon and Langland. He performed nearly the same mission as, centuries later, Bunyan and Wesley were to discharge in quickening the spiritual life of their times: and though he wanted the creative genius of the former and the administrative genius of the latter, his verse is much better than Bunyan's and his prose has a delicate aroma lacking in Wesley's. The verse, though seldom true poetry, is admirable for its homely energy, but, terse as the expression may be, the nature of the subject renders it discursive, and we shall do him more justice by citing his prose in a modernised form. He is, rather by parable than by argument, combating the notion so acceptable to lazy devotees, that good works, involving disturbance of the contemplative mood and contact with the world, are an absolute hindrance to the spiritual life :— *Rolle's character as an author*

"It fares thereby as if thou hadst a little coal and thou would'st make a fire therewith. Thou would'st put sticks and over them the coal, and if it seemed for a time that thou should'st quench the coal with the sticks, nevertheless when thou hast abidden awhile blow a little, anon springs up a great flame of fire, for the sticks are turned to fire. Right so spiritually; thy will and thy desire that thou hast to God is, as it were, a little coal of fire in thy soul, for it gives to thee somewhat of ghostly heat and ghostly light, but it is full little; for often it waxes cold and turns to fleshly lust, and sometimes into idleness. Therefore it is good that thou put these sticks, that is good works of active life. And if it so be that these sticks, as it seems, for a time hinder thy desire that it may not be so pure nor so fervent as thou would'st, be not too cast down therefore, but abide and suffer awhile, and so blow at the fire; that is, first do thy works and then go alone to thy prayers and thy meditations, and lift up thy heart to God and pray Him of His goodness that He will accept the works that thou doest to His pleasance. Hold thou these as nothing in thine own sight, but only at the mercy of Him. Acknowledge much thy wretchedness and thy frailty, and offer all thy good deeds soothfastly to Him inasmuch as they are good, and inasmuch as they are bad put them down to thyself. And for this meekness shall all thy deeds turn into flame of fire as sticks laid upon the coal."

It is clear that English prose in the middle of the fourteenth century, even in the mouth of a Northumbrian, had become capable of tenderness, force, and true eloquence. Rolle's genius was not equally turned to poetry, and we shall impart a more adequate notion of the powers of English speech in this department by citing an anonymous Northumbrian, who about 1330 composed the metrical sermons and tales edited by Mr. Small (*English Metrical Homilies*, 1862). This bard is peculiarly eminent for the rapidity and clearness of his narrative, which cannot be fully exhibited in a short extract. We therefore give the moral he appends to the edifying history of the usurer who, by advice of the bishop, suffers himself for his soul's health to be devoured by the reptiles miraculously engendered amid the grain which he has withheld from the poor :—

"This tale haf I now told here
To ger you se in quat manere
That the mare catel that man have
The mare and mare his hert doth crave
And mainly this akerers[1]
That are cursed for thair aferes
Bot yet thai here thair life amend
Thai wend til wormes witouten end
That sel them reuli rif and rend
In helle pine witouten end.
That wist this biscop witerlye,
And further did he quaintelye
Quen he gert wurmes ete this man
To yem his sawle fra Satan
For wormes suld his sawle have rended
Quas sa-ever it suld haf lended
Yf he no havid wel ben scriven,
And his caroin til wormes given.
Bot for his fless was pined here,
His sawl is now to Godd ful dere,
Thar it wones in plai and gamen,
Godd bring us thider alle samen!"

Dialectical peculiarities

Compositions like these are especially valuable in determining the condition of the spoken, as well as the written, language, since, being evidently even more designed to be recited to the illiterate than perused by the instructed, they can contain no words not in common use, and must faithfully represent the dialectical peculiarities of the district where they were written or copied. The affinity of the Northumbrian verses just quoted to the Lowland Scotch must have struck every reader. *Ger*, for instance (Scotch *gar—make*) never found admission into the speech of the South. The French *caroigne* (*carrion*) did gain entrance, and must have been universally understood. In the passage cited from Rolle, who wrote for educated readers, the Saxon stem is grafted with such foreign blooms as *circumstance, frailty, fervent, pleasance.*

Transition from the thirteenth to the fourteenth century

In the opinion of so distinguished an historian as Bishop Stubbs the world underwent a change for the worse at the beginning of the fourteenth century, which he sums up thus: "We pass from an age of heroism to an age of chivalry." Robert Bruce and the Black Prince scarcely seem less entitled to the praise of heroism than Simon de Montfort; and although it is true that the enterprises of the thirteenth century were more commonly than those of the fourteenth undertaken from idealised motives, the great disinterested crime of the crusade against the Albigenses was even more atrocious than the great selfish crime of the suppression of the Templars. But if the men were not individually worse, the general tendencies of the times inevitably brought about conditions, both moral and material, inciting good men to complaint and protest, and hence favourable to the growth of objurgatory and satiric poetry. It was in the nature of things that the system of chivalry which had developed in the dark ages should progress to a culminating point

[1] Usurers. German, *Wucherer.*

of splendour, but this involved costly ostentation and continual war, bringing along with them poverty and famine, and the systematic employment of hired mercenaries. It was equally inevitable that the enthusiasm which had created the religious orders of the preceding age should decay, and that the apostles of the thirteenth century should become the impostors of the fourteenth. The "Babylonish captivity" of the Church at Avignon augmented its corruptions and dimmed its halo of sanctity; while the unforeseen, and in

"Treuthe's Pilgryme atte Plow"

From MS. R. 3. 14, Trinity College, Cambridge

the then state of medical and sanitary knowledge, irresistible calamity of the Black Death, four times a visitor to England, by the havoc which it made among the labouring population, profoundly modified the existing social relations, and begot a spirit of discontent and revolt. Here were materials for a great satiric poet, and England found one in **William Langland**, the author of *Piers Plowman*. Yet as this Janus age had another and far different face; its gay and gallant aspects, its good-humour and genial enjoyment of life, the sumptuousness of its apparel, and the picturesqueness of its manners, were to be represented by another and a greater poet, the English

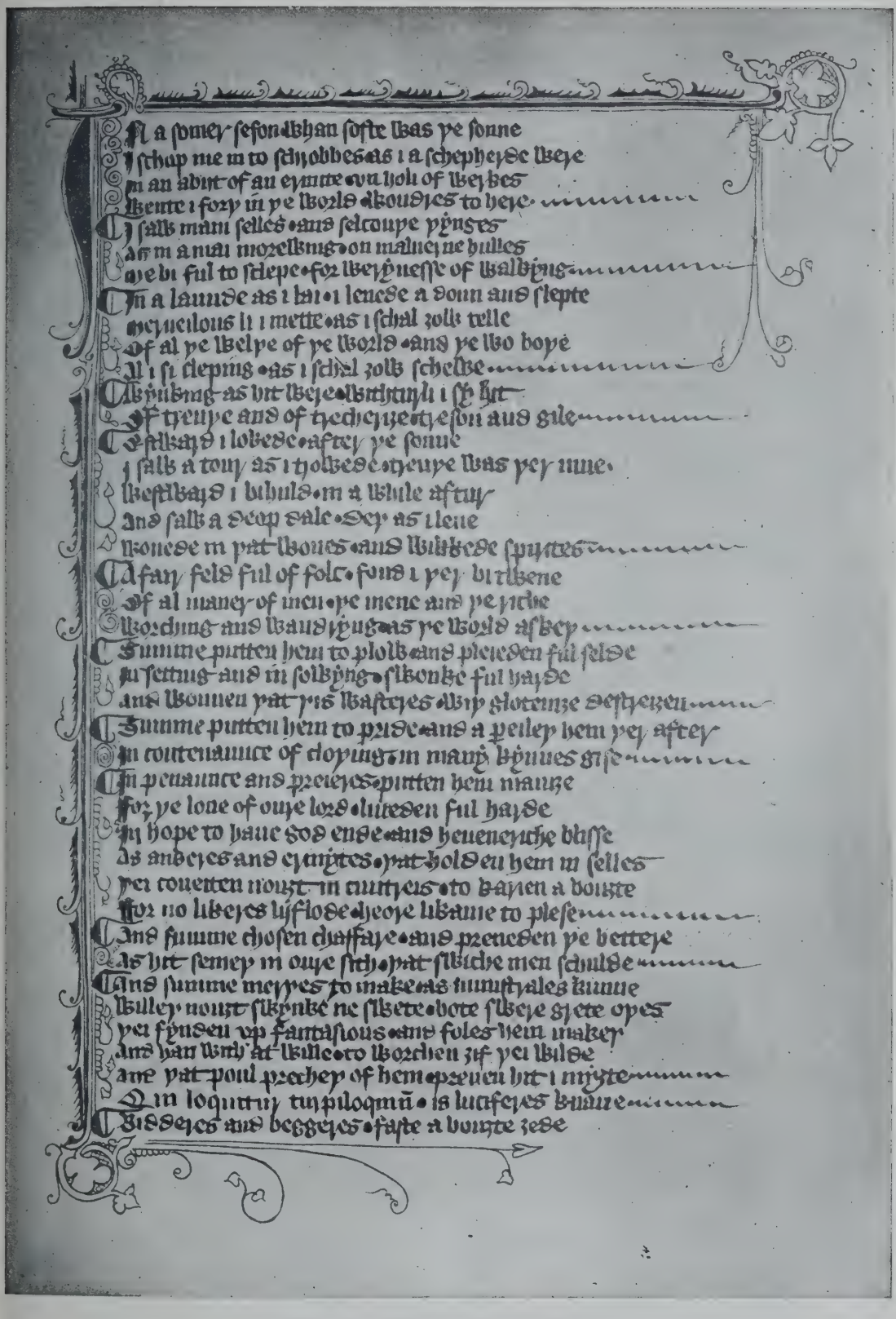
Boccaccio; as the seer of *Piers Plowman*, notwithstanding the enormous disparity of genius, may be styled the English Dante. Chaucer will need a chapter to himself. Langland may be fitly introduced here as the consummation of that strictly national style of poetry to which our attention has hitherto been mainly confined, and which, having been carried by him to the utmost height of which it was capable, is about to yield to a more perfect form of art, as Ennius and Lucilius of old gave place to Virgil and Horace.

Langland's "Piers Plowman"

The poem of *Piers Plowman* was widely popular from the first, but the author is named by no contemporary, and few circumstances of his life are positively known. It is, nevertheless, not difficult to form a fair picture of the man from the internal evidence of his work. He represents himself as beholding his vision on Malvern Hill, and there is no reason to distrust Bishop Bale's statement that he was born at Cleobury Mortimer, on the border of the adjacent county of Shropshire, though this is nearly three times as far from Malvern as the eight miles stated by Bale. It is within a few miles of Areley, where, more than a century before, Layamon had dwelt and sung. Langland's Shropshire or Worcestershire birth is also confirmed by the evidence of his West Midland dialect. From his own statement respecting the age he had attained about 1377, he would seem to have been born in 1332. He represents himself as having received a good education, but as having in some measure neglected his opportunities. His works, nevertheless, evince acquaintance with many Latin and French authors. He had taken minor orders, which did not disable him from marrying. The reason why he advanced no farther in the ecclesiastical hierarchy may well be that he was already married when ordained: he certainly had a legitimate wife and daughter by 1362. He was consequently unable to hold a benefice, and his principal vocation would be to participate in occasional services, especially masses for the dead. He speaks of himself as supported by Paternoster, Primer, and Psalter; and as dropping in from time to time "now at some gentleman's house, now at some lady's," "begging without bag or bottle," "roaming about, robed in russet." His life seems to have been chiefly spent in London, with many of whose streets and quarters he exhibits a close acquaintance. He had ample means of becoming intimate with all orders of society, and his mysticism is tempered by a wide knowledge of the world.

Character of Langland

The character assumed by Langland is that of the prophet, denouncing the sins of society and encouraging men to aspire to a higher life. He is perhaps the first English writer to appear formally in this capacity, and it might be difficult to find another by whom it has been supported with less of occasional unreason and fanaticism. He could never have rivalled the eloquence of a Carlyle or a Ruskin, even had the language in which he wrote been at as advanced a stage as theirs. But he is more constructive than the former, and more consistent than the latter. On the other hand, he has few deep or surprising gleams of insight. He is a conservative reformer, who would rather preserve by amendment than destroy to rebuild. He takes a keen interest in the politics of his day, and usually



From the "Vision of Piers Plowman."

[*Cottonian MS., Vesp. B. xvi., British Museum.*]

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sides with the Commons in their disputes with the Crown. He is always patriotic, and, as M. Jusserand says, insular; he would maintain the old distinctions of classes and fix wages by the authority of the State; he detests Lombards as Queen Anne's country gentlemen detested the moneyed interest. Stringent and fiery in reproof as he is, he is yet tender to penitent transgressors. His liberality of nature is shown by his kindly mention of the Jew. Honest, healthy, homely, he is an Englishman of the best type, a precursor and practically an ally of Wycliffe, dealing with the ethical side of current beliefs and customs as Wycliffe dealt with the theological. His Protestantism is undeveloped, he preserves considerable

Malvern Church

From Blore's "History of Worcestershire"

respect for the Chair of Peter, but his tendencies are entirely anti-sacerdotal. He bitterly denounces the worldliness of the Papacy, the greed of the legates the luxury of the clergy, and the traffic in relics and indulgences, and plainly foretells the downfall of the religious houses:

> "And now [he says] is religion a rider, a roamer by streets,
> A leader of lovedayes and a land-buyer,
> A priker on a palfrey from manor to manor,
> A hep of houndes at his ers, as he a lord were,
> And but his knave knele, that shall his cuppe bring,
> He lowreth on hym, and asketh hym who taught hym curtesie."

Langland represents the dissatisfaction of the lower and the more thinking classes of English society as Chaucer represents the content of the aristocracy and the prosperous middle class. Each is in a manner the comple-

ment of the other. It is significant that Langland is cited as an authority by John Ball, the leader of the great revolution of the peasantry in 1381.

When this quotation was made, *Piers Plowman* had existed in its original recension for nineteen years, since this alludes to events of the year 1362, and to none of later date. Langland was thus about thirty when the vision befell him upon Malvern Hill:

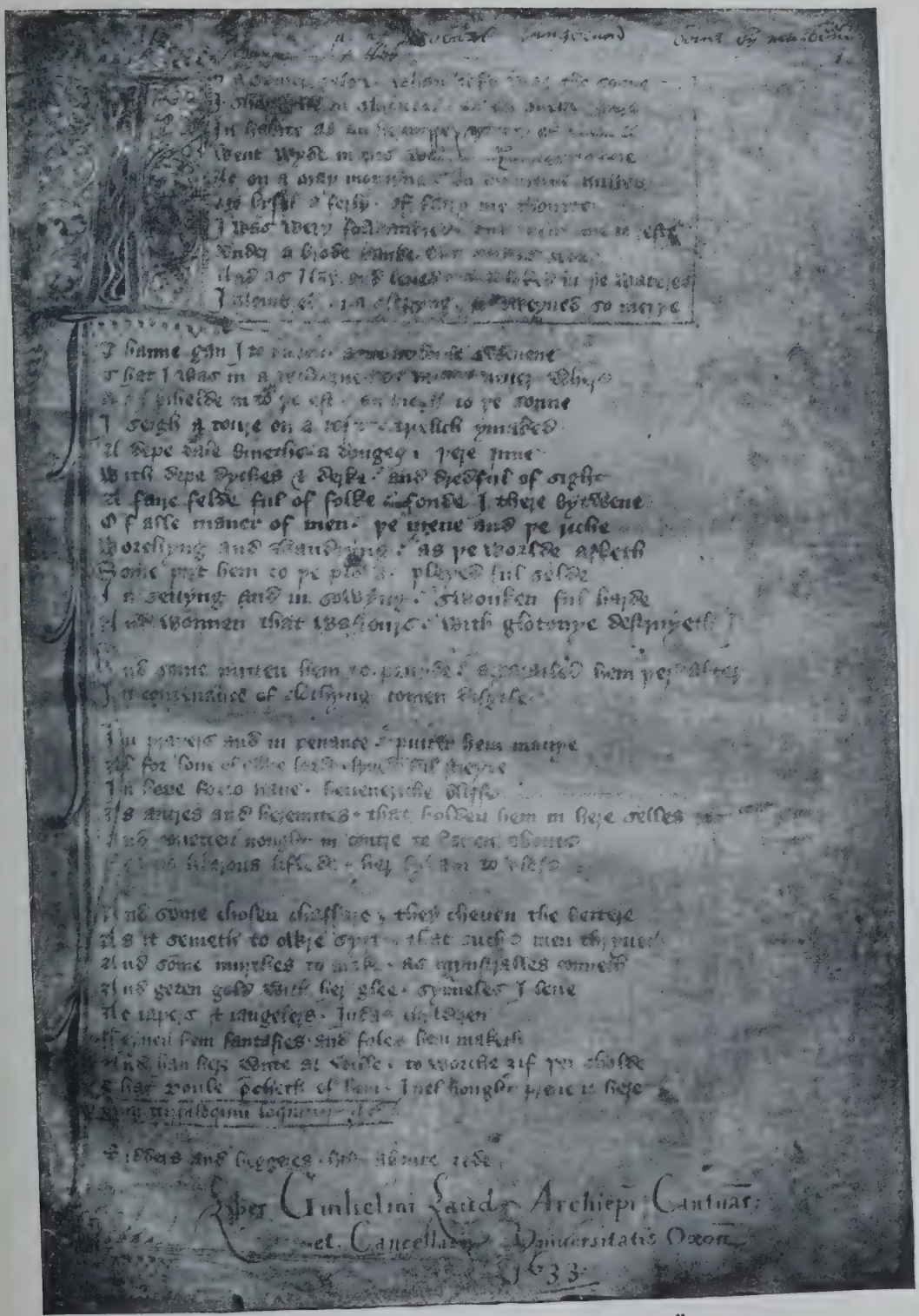
> "In a summer season, when soft was the sun,
> I shop me into a shroud, a sheep as I were;
> In habit of an hermit unholy of works,
> Wended I wyden in this world, wonders to hea
> But in a May morning on Malvern hills,
> Me befel a ferley, a feyrie methought;
> I was weary of wandringe and went me to rest
> Under a broad bank by a bourne side,
> And as I lay and leaned and looked on the water,
> I slumbered in a sleeping, it sounded so murrie."

Metre and diction of "Piers Plowman"

This short extract suffices to show Langland's system of metre, which is the Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse of four accents. His adoption of it at a time when it was generally yielding to rhymed metres is expressive of the sturdily English character of the man and of the poem. It is by no means unsuited to his talent, favouring the pregnant brevity in which he excels, and enabling him to depict persons and qualities by swift forcible strokes. He has probably extracted as much sonority and modulation from it as it admits, and thus performed the negative service of showing its unfitness for the higher grades of poetry. The need for several accentuated words in the same line adapted it to a monosyllabic language, and it became more difficult to handle in proportion as long words came into use. Langland's diction also is instructive, as showing the progress effected towards a recognised standard of literary speech. Though using a West Midland dialect, he is much nearer modern English than his predecessor Layamon. He is sometimes free in the employment of French and Latin words.

Conduct of the poem

At the beginning the poet has a vision of a castle upon a hill and a dungeon below, the intermediate space occupied by a crowd of people engaged in various occupations, generally of an unsanctified nature. Holy Church descends and informs the dreamer that the castle is Truth and the dungeon the dwelling of Falsehood. She gives him much wholesome admonition, and he mingles with the throngs of actual persons and allegorical abstractions. If Langland's terseness and pungency often remind us of Dante, his taste for allegory not unfrequently suggests the second part of *Faust*. "Meed," which may perhaps be defined as self-interest, Conscience, Reason, Truth, Kynde (Nature), the seven deadly sins, all play their parts. The scene changes to Westminster, and the king comes on the stage. He proposes that Meed should reform and espouse Conscience; she is willing, but Conscience refuses and Reason is called in to settle the dispute between them. Meed is condemned, but ere a decisive conclusion is reached the dreamer finds himself occupied with another vision and listening to the confessions of the Seven Deadly



First Page of the MS. of "Piers Plowman"

Bodleian Library, Oxford

Sins addressed to Reason. At length Piers Plowman himself appears, not, as some have thought, the author himself, but a mystic figure, representing the ideal of conduct, and seeming gradually to assume the semblance of the Saviour. This is particularly apparent in the latter and more recent part of the poem, a series of visions intermixed with homilies, written from time to time as questions, secular or spiritual, forced themselves upon the poet. Universal love, good works, and the discouragement of earthly pride and spiritual imposture, are the burden of the whole, and the poem may be regarded as a commentary upon the aspects of the age as they presented themselves to a pious and high-minded man, a thorough Englishman in blood and intellect, and entirely unaffected by the Renaissance influences which were moulding men abroad. *Piers Plowman* showed that England could go high within her own limits, but also showed that much more was needed ere her literature could become important beyond them.

Most of the poem was rewritten. The principal additions are the cantos entitled *Do-well*, *Do-better*, and *Do-best*. These are more mystical and allegorical than the commencement, and the poet's thought is often hard to follow. At the conclusion he awakes, leaving the castle of Unity erected by Piers Plowman besieged by Antichrist, and in imminent jeopardy. If this alludes to the Great Schism it is later than 1378. The alterations and additions seem to have been published about this date, and again about 1393. If, as is probable, Langland is the author of the unfinished poem which Professor Skeat has entitled *Richard the Redeless* (ill advised), he had returned to the West of England, for this piece appears to have been written at Bristol, which perhaps accounts for the number of nautical terms it contains. In it the poet, who had already admonished the wilful and erring Richard the Second, returns to the task, and seems to have found that it was too late, for the poem breaks off abruptly. Richard's deposition took place in September 1399, and it is not probable that Langland long survived it.

We have characterised the author of *Piers Plowman* as a satiric poet, and such he essentially is, although he is also much more. He has decided views on political and social questions; the feudal system is his ideal; he desires no change in the institutions of his days, and thinks that all would be well if the different orders of society would but do their duty. The ecclesiastics and the peasants are the worst offenders; the former by luxury and greed, the latter by indolence. Like Dante and Bunyan, he ennobles his satire by arraying it in a garb of allegory, and his resemblance to the latter, who can hardly have read him, is sometimes startling. Langland's inferiority is chiefly in his inability to realise abstractions; he must see a thing before he paints it, and his vision is not that of the inner eye. His imagery is rustic and homely: the blood of Christ is mortar, the Church a roof, Christianity a cart. But, writing of what is familiar to him, he is intensely real. His vigour and incisiveness when he depicts what he has actually got before him may be illustrated by his delineation of

Envy, quoted with some curtailment from Miss Warren's admirable prose rendering :—

> "He was as pale as a pellet (stone bullet) and seemed in the palsy ; and like a leek which has lain long in the sun, so he looked with his hollow cheeks and evil scowl. His body was well-nigh swollen to bursting for anger, so that he bit his lips and went along clenching his fist, and thought to avenge himself in deeds or in words when he saw his time."
>
> [Envy, nevertheless, is sick of himself, and would repent if he knew how. After owning that he would rather hear of the misfortune of a neighbour than be himself enriched by "a wey of cheese," he proceeds]
>
> "When I come to the church, and should kneel to the Rood, and pray for the people as the priest teaches, then I ask on my knees that Christ would give them sorrow who bore away my bowl and tattered sheet. I turn my eye from the altar and see how Ellen has a new coat, and then I wish it were mine, and all it came from. And thus I live loveless like an evil dog, and all my body swelleth for the bitterness of my gall. I have not eaten as a man ought for many years, for envy and an evil will are hard to digest. Can no sugar nor sweet thing assuage my swelling? nor diapendion (emollient) drive it from my heart, nor neither shrift nor shame, except one scrape my maw?"
>
> "Yes," readily said Repentance, and counselled him for the best. "Sorrow for sins is the salvation of souls."

This is emphatically Piers Plowman's message, and his delivery of it is perhaps the first conspicuous instance in our history of Literature taking upon herself what had hitherto been the especial office of the Church.

"Piers Plowman's Creed"

The Creed of Piers Plowman, generally printed with *The Vision,* is an imitation, which Professor Skeat has shown to be by the author of *The Plowman's Tale,* erroneously attributed to Chaucer. The writer is a follower of Wycliffe, and has much of his poetical model's spirit and graphic power. He represents himself as going from one order of friars to another in quest of the peace that passeth understanding, until, disgusted by their luxury and crediting all the aspersions which they cast upon each other, he at last betakes himself to the light yoke and easy burden of the Saviour.

CHAPTER IV

ANGLO-NORMAN LITERATURE, ROMANCE, BALLAD, AND HISTORY

We have in the last chapter traced the course of English literature from the period when, already from various causes in a languishing condition, it seemed all but annihilated by the catastrophe of foreign conquest, until the period of revival in the fourteenth century. At the time at which we have arrived it stands upon the verge of a renaissance as unforeseen as its fall; partly due to alliance with the other literature which had for a time threatened to overwhelm it, partly to that general awakening of the mind of Europe in which all the principal nations were beginning to participate.

Two characteristics of native English literature will have been remarked, its limited range and its general seriousness. One exceptional man, Layamon, has made an attempt to transplant the epic into English, but his example has hardly found an imitator. One or two metrical histories, and a faint dawn of lyrical poetry, remain to be noticed, but these will hardly affect the general impression that the intellectual interests of the Saxon mind of the period were mainly connected with religion. Nor is this interest inspired by theological or philosophical research; it is almost entirely confined to religion in its practical aspects. It must have seemed, up to the middle of the fourteenth century, as if English literature, so far as it was Saxon, might dwindle to the level of the most diminutive European literatures of our day—Breton, Basque, Romansch—and consist mainly of catechisms and manuals of devotion. Yet, as has been shown by extracts from Richard Rolle, the language had by the fourteenth century become capable of real eloquence in prose. The limitations of its literature were mainly to be ascribed to the paralysis of the national spirit by subjugation to the foreigner, which necessarily ceased when the foreigner himself had become absorbed into the Englishman. Awakening from its slumber, English literature, like Adam, found a companion by its side.

Anglo-Norman literature

In the time of Edward the Confessor the Normans already possessed a literature derived from France, scarcely indeed extending beyond the domain of narrative poetry, yet active and progressive, while that of England lay sunk in torpor. Transplantation to England modified this literature in but one respect, the infusion of romantic feeling which it received from a closer contact with the sources of Celtic tradition, hitherto only accessible in Brittany. Otherwise

the Norman poets and chroniclers continued to write as they would have written in Normandy, and owed as little to the Anglo-Saxons as these owed to them. The contrast between the two literatures is striking: the Anglo-Saxon, rustic, serious, homely, chiefly concerning itself with the next world; the Norman gay, gallant, secular, the minister and darling of a brilliant court. The same character of superior urbanity and polish applies equally to the Norman divines and the Norman historians, though this is less superficially apparent on account of their having mostly written in Latin. Everywhere, however, the Norman appears as pre-eminently the aristocratic literature, the instruction or the amusement of the classes distinguished by nobility of birth or superiority of education, while the Saxon creeps on in obscurity, the "treasure of the humble." That it should nevertheless become in process of time the dominant element, and absorb its rival, was a necessary consequence of the political conditions of the times, which happily favoured the peaceful amalgamation of the nations and the languages. The absolute extrusion of either element by the other would have been greatly to be deplored; and, taking a wide view, it must be allowed to have been far more for the interest of humanity that a language like modern English should arise, uniting the best elements of Romance and of Teutonic speech, than that either the Romanic or the Teutonic family should be augmented by yet another dialect. The part assigned to each of the amalgamating idioms corresponded to that filled by each respectively during the period of their estrangement. To the Norman, gay and courtly words expressive of luxury and refinement, and those concerned with the more subtle operations of the intellect: to the Saxon, familiar terms, names of ordinary objects, article, pronoun, particle, whatever knits and binds a language. Nor must the great indirect influence of easier access to Latin be overlooked. Hitherto, except as regarded ecclesiastical terms, Latin had not been an important factor in the formation of English, but now Latin words began to enter freely without the ordeal of an intermediate stage of French.

These observations relate principally to the condition of the English language and literature about the middle of the fourteenth century, when, in Juvenal's phrase, the Orontes was beginning to flow into the Tiber. A great experiment was about to be tried. The Saxon speech by itself was clearly inadequate to the needs of the now united and fast expanding nation; but without a healthy national instinct there was great danger lest the national speech should degenerate into a formless jargon. We have seen how Langland dealt with it, and seen that his treatment was unsatisfactory, inasmuch as he adhered too strictly to the old vocabulary and old metrical forms. We shall see the course adopted by the other great writers who fortunately arose about this time. Before, however, coming to Chaucer, Gower, Wycliffe, and Mandeville, it will be convenient to investigate the Norman element now about to be incorporated with English, alike in its own history and in the character of the English writers, principally poets, who had arisen under its influence; and also with reference to the influence of Norman ideas and institutions in moulding the English mind.

Early French poetry

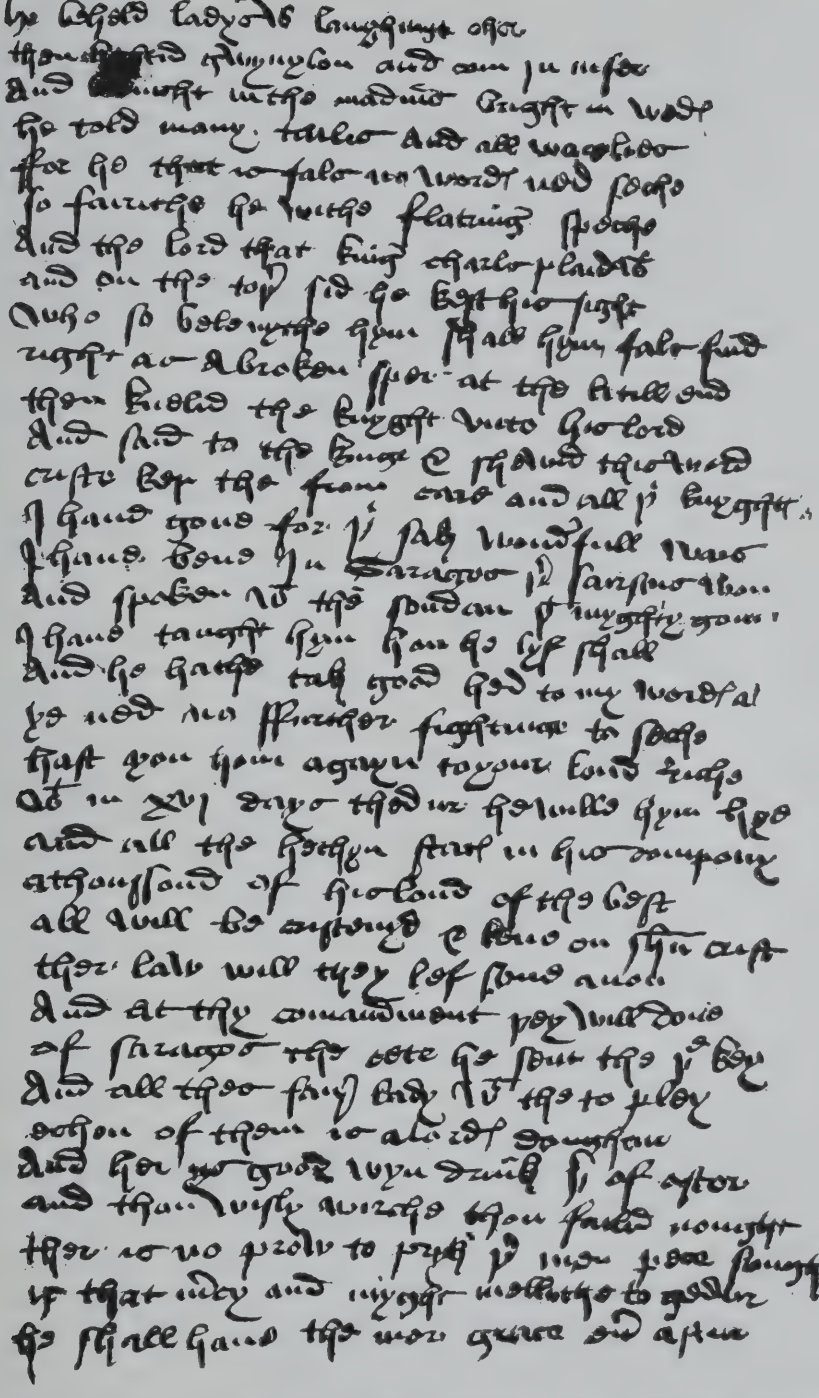
It appears at first sight an anomaly that the Latinised nations of the Middle Ages, superior to the Germanic in civilisation, should have been more tardy in developing national literatures. Even if we dated the beginning of English literature as low as Caedmon, which would be too large a concession, it would have existed for more than three centuries before anything deserving the appellation of a vernacular literature existed in France. The cause was the dependence of literature upon language, and the degree in which the formation of a vernacular adequate for literary purposes was retarded by the taint of barbarism which clung to it, and by the position of Latin as the accepted medium of law, learning, government, and worship. To the Anglo-Saxon Latin was a language indispensable indeed for many purposes, but diverse from his own ; to the Frenchman it was a tongue to which he owed allegiance, and of which his ordinary speech was a debased and barbarous dialect. There is sufficient proof of the existence of a language which may be called French in the early part of the ninth century, but save for ballads, whose existence is rather a matter of inference than of knowledge, there is no evidence of its employment for literary purposes until early in the eleventh. Its beginnings precisely corresponded with the initial stages of Anglo-Saxon literature. Poetry was for long the only description of literature attempted ; the authors were minstrels, or, when this was not the case, the *jongleur* disseminated the work of the *trouvère ;* the exploits of heroes were their themes, and their public was one of nobles and warriors. In its original shape French literature was an accumulation of the *chansons de geste*, probably founded upon a pre-existing literature —but produced so copiously during the eleventh and twelfth centuries that the number of lines extant even now has been estimated at between two and three millions. As the name implies, these were ballad epics. They were composed in what are now called Alexandrine lines of ten or twelve syllables, three syllables to a foot, after this pattern :

Seigneurs, or faictes silence ; s'il vous plait, escoutez,

arranged in *tirades*, or sets of assonant verses repeating the same merely vowel rhyme till the poet was tired of it, or it of him. This latter circumstance need not soon occur, since, if we may have recourse to the English tongue for the sake of illustration, *doll* would be a permissible rhyme to *dog*.

There is no good reason to suppose that these *chansons* originated in Provence, although the Provençal poets afterwards greatly expanded the range of poetry, and did much to refine and embellish metrical forms. But these ballad epics had their birth in the north and east of France, and the Normans, if not the original inventors, speedily became familiarised with them. The themes to which they were originally for the most part confined illustrate the working of the human mind in all ages, and reflect light on a still more interesting literary episode, the origin of the Homeric poems. One great figure, Charlemagne, filled the popular imagination, and appears in the *chansons* as the centre of a group of paladins, historical, perhaps, as regards the existence of some of them, but imaginary as concerns the exploits attributed to them. It being easier to take

Carlovingian cycle of romance



From a Fragment of a Fifteenth-Century Translation of the "Chanson de Roland"

British Museum, Lansdowne MS. 388

liberties with such children of the imagination than with an authentic and imposing figure like Charlemagne, the latter out of mere dignity gradually retires into the background, and Roland and Renaud take his place, as Achilles and Ulysses long ago took Agamemnon's. What the Trojan War was to ancient Greece, the strife with barbarous invaders was to Europe from the ninth to the eleventh century. By far the finest example of the *chansons de geste* is the *Chanson de Roland*, not the same as that sung at Hastings by the minstrel Taillefer, but produced, most probably, by a Norman minstrel in England, before the end of the century, and attributed in the only extant MS. to a poet named Turoldus, if this be not rather the name of the transcriber. The relation of these spirited but artless performances to the elaborate Italian epics on the Charlemagne cycle is probably much the same as that of the lost ballad poetry of ancient Greece to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The influence of the *Chanson de Roland* and other poems in which Charlemagne was represented as in conflict with the Saracens must have been an important factor in the state of feeling which produced the Crusades, and is concentrated in the history attributed with pious faith to Archbishop Turpin, a forgery of the eleventh century. It is a singular instance of romantic misrepresentation that, although Roland's expedition to Spain and death are historical, he was in reality not cut off by the Paynim, but by Christian Basques.

The Carlovingian *chanson de geste* produced little impression upon English literature, being within a century after the Conquest superseded even in France by another cycle of romance more attractive to the inhabitants of Britain. When the mine of Carlovingian tradition became exhausted the Norman minstrels, about 1160, turned to the story of Arthur, which they learned sometimes from tradition preserved among the Bretons, sometimes perhaps from the chronicles of Nennius, or from their own actual contact with the Welsh. In any case the Arthurian legend supplied their poets with a rich variety of subjects, and Englishmen, forgetting the actual circumstances of the struggle between Saxon and Celt in Arthur's days, were willing to accept him as a national hero. A common ground was thus created upon which Norman and Saxon could meet, and as the treatment which suited Arthurian themes was soon found to be appropriate to situations of similar character, a school of metrical romance arose, which partly by direct translation, partly by imitation, enriched English literature with many compositions of importance. The French poems upon which these were based cannot, of course, be claimed for English literature; yet, although the most distinguished writer of them, Chrétien de Troyes, was a Frenchman in every respect, there is reason to believe that most of their authors were Anglo-Norman. For a survey of the Arthurian romance as a whole the reader will be best referred to the digest of it in the great prose epic of Sir Thomas Malory in the fifteenth century; but the principal metrical romances, whether actually English or merely English in so far as they influenced English feeling, may well be treated in this place. Whether from Celtic influence, or for some other reason, they exhibit a decided advance upon the manners and feelings depicted in the

Arthurian cycle

chansons de geste, and ultimately attain the ideal of chivalry as understood in the days of the Black Prince. This implies the recognition of love, an element almost entirely absent from the *chansons de geste*, as a leading motive, and denotes a wider range of emotion and sentiment than had found literary expression for several centuries, foreshadowing and, in a measure, preparing the modern novel; while the form is substantially that whose revival by Scott and Coleridge broke in a later age the artificial fetters which had prevailed to trammel English poetry.

Mediæval material for legendary poetry

It requires some consideration ere we can fully realise how extensive a store of material for fiction lay at the disposition of the romancers of the twelfth and the two following centuries. The development of fiction from the incidents of ordinary life was yet to come, or at least was beginning but feebly in the *fabliau*, corresponding to the modern metrical *conte*, and in the Italian novelette. The only material as yet generally recognised as proper for fiction was that consecrated by history or tradition, or at least professedly linked to some famous institution like Arthur's Round Table. Yet, even with these restrictions, the available store was very copious. The romancer had classical literature at his command to a great extent, much authentic history, and the two great legendary cycles of Troy and Alexander the Great. Homer, indeed, was inaccessible, but the apocryphal compilations attributed to Dictys Cretensis and Dares Phrygius supplied his place and something more. Virgil and Ovid were not unknown; many authentic passages of ancient history were familiar; and the Sibylline books were in themselves a literature. Charlemagne for France, Arthur for England, formed the nucleus of an extensive body of romance, and the adventures of their followers presented an illimitable field for invention. In course of time a number of miscellaneous romances sprang up, some, such as the powerful tale of Hamlet, derived from Scandinavian sources; others strangely distorted versions of Oriental ideas as conveyed in *Barlaam and Josaphat*, *Syntipas*, *Kalilah and Dimnah*. These almost invariably shade off into the avowedly didactic fiction, of which *Sidrac*, avowedly borrowed from the East, is an example: or into the allegorical, a near neighbour of the Æsopic fable, also well known, and helping to produce the world-famous fiction of Reynard the Fox, which renders the novel a weapon of satire. Bordering upon this, and hovering between satire and edification, we find religious visions of the other world, such as Tundale's trance, and the relation of St. Patrick's purgatory, rude precursors of the *Divina Commedia*. Nor must we forget legends of ecclesiastical miracle, sometimes pious monastic frauds or actual hallucinations, sometimes like the voyage of St. Brandan, Christianised versions of ancient myths. On the whole, it may well be affirmed that man's appetite for the marvellous was amply provided for in the Middle Age, and that nothing prevented the development of a rich poetical literature but the shortcomings of mediæval language. The tool was as yet inadequate to the work; the poet did not as yet possess either a sufficiently ample vocabulary, or sufficient command of the vocabulary he had. There was also an absolute lack on the audience's part of that critical taste which, when not itself

perverted, keeps up the standard of a literature; and as the poet sang for a livelihood, with little care for posthumous reputation, he wanted the higher motives which in other ages have lent elevation to poetry.

Metrical innovations of the English poets

These points duly considered, the work of the metrical romancer must appear highly creditable. There is a clear distinction between the French who wrought for courts and the English who, writing in an unfashionable language, addressed a lower order of society, but this is no proof of the latter's inferiority in original power. In one respect the later English romancers are entitled to credit, their improvements in metrical form. The French poets, other than the authors of the *chansons de geste*, commonly write in octosyllabic couplets, taxed in a later day with "fatal facility," and consequently tending to prolixity, defects which the English minstrels of the time of Edward III. usually remedy by adopting a regular strophe, doubtless of French invention, and known as the *rime croisée* in distinction from the *rime plate*, or consecutive rhyme, demanding more care on the part of the writer and more grateful to the ear. The following example of the *rime plate* is from the romance of *Richard Cœur de Lion*, where Richard, having "robbed the lion of his heart," proceeds to devour this raw, to the dismay of the Emperor of Germany:

From the metrical romance of "Richard Cœur de Lion"

Wynkyn de Worde, 1528

The king at meat sat on des,[1]
With dukes and earles proud in pres;
The sale[2] on the table stood;
Richard pressed out all the blood,
And wet the hearte in the salt,
The king and all his men behalt;

[1] Dais.

[2] Salt cellar. The final e, when not elided before a following vowel, is sounded as a distinct syllable. *Behalt*, beheld; *skee*, quickly; cognate with *shoot* and *scoot*. *Ywis*, certainly; German *gewiss*.

Withuten bread the heart he ate.
The king he wondered, and said skeet,
Ywis, as I understand can,
This is a devil, and no man,
That has my strong lion yslawe,
The heart out of his body drawe,
And has it eaten with good will.
He may be called of righte skill,
King y-christened of most renown,
Strong Richard Cœur de Lion.

This is direct forcible writing, but has none of the metrical charm of the *rime croisée*, which develops the couplet into the stanza. The following example is from *Amis and Amilion :*

"Thou art," she said, "a gentle knight,
And I, a bird in bower bright,
And of high kin y-coren.
Both by day and by night
My love is on thee alight,
My wit is nigh forloren.
Plight me thy truth, thou shalt be true,
And never change for no new
That in this world is born.
And I shall pledge my truth also
Till God and death part us a-two,
I shall not be forsworn."
That hende[1] knighte stille stood,
For that he changed all his mood,
And said with wordes free,
"Madame! for him that died on rood,
As thou art of gentil blood
And heire of this land shalt be.
Think on all thy much honour.
No kynge's son, no emperour
Were not too good for thee :
Certes, then were it unright
Thy love to lay upon a knight
That hath neither land nor fee."

This is a fair average specimen of the versification of the majority of the English metrical romances, and it is in general both musical and sonorous. If it occasionally appears to halt a little, the flaw was probably disguised in recitation. One of the most beautiful (*Lai le Fraine*) is in lines rhyming consecutively ; but here the refinement of the author's ear enabled him to dispense with artificial harmonies. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is in alliterative verse, divided into stanzas, each with a short refrain. The superiority of rhyme to alliteration for recitative purposes, especially if there was any musical accompaniment, must soon have become manifest : indeed the author of *William the Were-wolf* apologises for not rhyming on the ground of his finding alliteration easier. No one seems to have thought of turning the alliterative staves into rhymed metre until, "with a leap and a bound, the swift anapaests thronged" in at the Restoration.

[1] Gentle.

Contrary to reasonable anticipation, the Arthurian romance did not attain its full development in England until the fifteenth century, when the great prose compilation of Malory, being made at a more advanced period of the language, achieved what no mediæval minstrel could have done by giving our literature a permanent classic. As it cannot be noticed in this place, it will be desirable to refrain from the discussion of the leading Arthurian metrical romances belonging to the Lancelot, Perceval, and Sanct Greal cycles, and the interesting question as to the part which Walter Map may have had in them, and to deal solely with those which lie on the verge of the Arthurian cycle. If the attention given to these and other romances should at first sight appear less than they might demand, it is to be remembered that they do not, strictly speaking, belong to English literature, being for the most part translations or free paraphrases from the French. Were they omitted, however, we should have little idea of the verse which delighted the higher classes of society while the people fed upon Piers Plowman. The public which they have in view is evidently one able to appreciate refined sentiments and polished manners, but a grade below the highest, whose language is still French.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

From the fourteenth-century MS. in the British Museum

Romance of "Sir Gawain"

One of the Arthurian lays not intimately connected with the great Arthurian epic stands out boldly from the rest in poetical merit, and, at the same time, though owing much to Chrétien de Troyes, contains more original matter than usual. This is *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the work of an anonymous minstrel, whom we shall afterwards meet as the author of a still more interesting poem, *The Pearl*. The subject is the humiliation of Sir Gawain, who, to acquire a magic scarf which will preserve him in imminent peril, to a slight extent deviates from the faith he has pledged to the Green Knight, and

dismissed by the latter with the scarf, returns to Arthur's court wearing this as a token of disgrace, but finds himself welcomed, and the scarf esteemed a badge of honour. It can scarcely be doubted that we have here a figurative setting forth of the institution of the Order of the Garter in 1347. Unfortunately, the language of the poem, which is in a West Midland dialect, is exceedingly crabbed, and the difficulty of following it is increased by the alliterative metre. It will be most enjoyed in Miss Jessie Weston's admirable prose version : for the sake, however, of adherence to the original form, we quote a stanza modernised by Mr. Gollancz :

O'er a mound in the morn he merrily rides
Into a forest full deep and wondrously wild ;
High hills on each side and holt woods beneath
With huge hoary oaks, a hundred together :
Hazel and hawthorn hung clustering there,
With rough ragged moss o'ergrown all around.
Unblithe, on bare twigs, sang many a bird,
Piteously piping for pain of the cold;
Under these Gawayne on Gringolet glided
Through marsh and through mire, mortal full lonesome ;
Cumbered with care, lest ne'er he should come
To that sire's service, who on that same night
Was born of a bride to vanquish our bale.
Wherefore sighing he said, I beseech thee, O Lord,
And Mary, the mildest mother so dear,
Some homestead, where holily may I hear mass
And matins to-morrow, full meekly I ask,
Thereto promptly I pay pater, ave, and creed.
He rode on in his prayer,
And cried for each misdeed,
He crossed him oftener there,
And said, Christ's cross me speed !

This refrain, repeating the same sound but not the same words at the termination of every strophe, is known to the French minstrels as the "tail-rhyme" (*rime couée*).

Gawain appears to be a local hero from the British kingdom of Cumbria. Another British kingdom, Cornwall, supplies an important figure in King Mark, husband of the fair Yseult, and hence in close connection with Tristram of Lyonesse, not originally connected with the Arthurian cycle, but gradually made one of its leading personages, whose pathetic history has in our days afforded a theme for the music of Wagner and the poetry of Swinburne, Arnold and Binyon. There is a broad distinction between the two classes of the numerous mediæval poems treating of the subject : one, and the more numerous, exhibiting King Mark in the most unfavourable light, the other representing him as an object of respect ; the former making the effects of Brangwen's magic potion temporary, the latter representing them as perpetual ; the former connecting Tristram with the Arthurian cycle, the latter keeping him apart. The former class appears to derive from a possibly apocryphal minstrel named Bereul, the latter from an equally uncertain "Thomas of Brittany." Its chief representative is the German poem of *Gottfried of Strassburg*, a very fine

Other Arthurian romances

performance, admirably translated by Miss Jessie Weston, to whom we are also indebted for prose renderings of four delightful English romances of the outlying Arthurian romance—*Guingamor*, *Launfal*, *Tyolet*, and the *Were-wolf*. *Guingamor* and *Launfal* are fairy romances, which seems to leave no doubt of their Celtic origin, though they now exist only in the *lais* founded by Marie de France on the original traditions. The wild story of the Were-wolf, though versified by Marie under the title *Bisclavaret*, appears rather Teutonic than Celtic; her *Tyolet* reproduces the motive of the Perceval class of romances, so important a section of the Arthurian cycle, the boy with all the instincts of a warrior brought up afar from arms, and not knowing weapons even by sight. The situation of Achilles in Scyros is substantially the same, but does not admit the delightful *naïveté* of Tyolet, who takes the first knight he sees for a strange animal. "Tell me, thou Knight Beast, what dost thou bear on thy head?" "If," he tells his mother, "I may not be even such a beast as I saw, little joy shalt thou have of me henceforward."

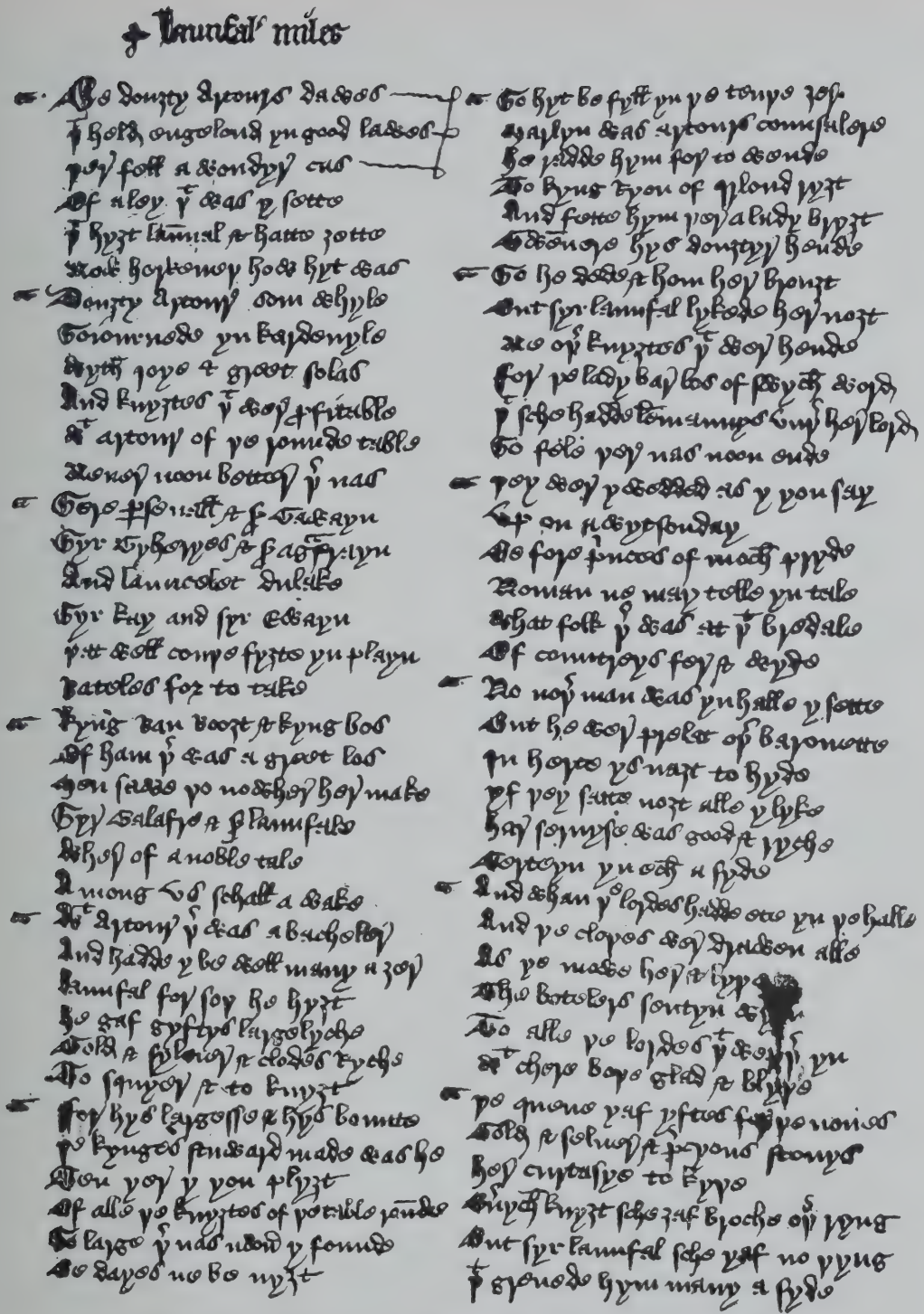
The motives of *Tyolet* and the *Were-wolf* were blended together about the end of the twelfth century into the French romance of *Guillaume de Palerme*. The English version of this, made about 1340, has passages of singular beauty, one of which we give as modernised by Dr. Guest: A herdsman sits "clouting his shoon," while his dog noses in the grass, and the little child creeps out of the cave where he is being reared by the friendly were-wolf:

> He gat him out of the bushes that were greenly blown,
> And leaved full lively, so that they gave great shade;
> And the birds right shrilly sang in the boughs;
> Forsooth for the melody that they made in the May season
> That little child, with joy, crept out of his cave,
> Fair flowers to fetch that he saw before him,
> And to gather some of the grapes that were green and fair.
> And when he had gone forth, so well it pleased him,
> The savour of the sweet season and the song of the birds,
> That he rambled fast about, flowers to gather,
> And amused himself long while listening to that merry-making.

The child is discovered by the dog, and adopted by the Roman Emperor, with whose daughter he elopes when he is grown up. It being satisfactorily established, however, that he is a Sicilian prince, and that the were-wolf is a metamorphosed Spanish prince, all ends happily. It is a beautiful tale throughout, and the more interesting if we can suppose it to have originated among the Sicilian Normans.

Marie de France

MARIE DE FRANCE, authoress of the four *lais* rendered by Miss Weston, is one of the most interesting of poetesses. She has high claims to our attention, not merely from her genius, but as a connecting link between the literatures of France, England, and Brittany—French by her birth and language, English by residence for part of her life and the English translations made from her, Breton by the original sources of her poems. Her own statement to this effect is fully borne out by the local colouring of most of the pieces, especially by the part assigned in some of them to the fairies. She wrote twelve *lais* altogether,



From a MS. translation by Thomas Chestre of the "Lay of Launfal" by Marie de France

British Museum, Cotton. MS. Caligula, A 2.

some of which have in our time been imitated by the late Arthur O'Shaughnessy. Her Sir Launfal found a translator in Thomas Chestre, and *Lai le Fraine* (*Lay of the Ash Tree*) an anonymous interpreter as true a poet as herself :—

The maid took the child her mid[1]
And stale away in an even tid,
And passed over a wild heath,
Through field and thorough wood she geth
All the winter longe night.
The weather was clear, the moon was light.
So that she cum by a forest side ;
She wox all weary, and gan abide.
Soon after she gan heark
Cockes crow and dogges bark,
She arose, and thither wold ;
Near and nearer she gan behold
Walls and houses fele[2] she seigh ;
A church with steeple fair and high.
There n'as there nother street nor town,
But a house of religioun ;
An order of nonnes, well y-dight
To serve God both day and night.
The maiden abode no lengore,
But yede her to the church's door,
And on knees she set her down,
And said, weepand, her orisoun.
. . . . .
She looked up and by her seigh
An asche by her, fair and high
Well y-boughed, of mickle price.
The body was hollow, as many one is.
Therein she laid the child for cold
In the pell,[3] as it was, y-fold,
And blessed it with all her might :
With that it gan to dawe light.
The fowles up, and sang on bough,
And acre-men yede to the plough.
The maiden turned again anon,
And took the way she had ere gon.

The metrical novelties of *Christabel* would evidently have been no novelties to the old poets. When Coleridge professed to have discovered a new principle of versification, he, in Dr. Guest's words, "mistook the gradual awakening of memory for the slow and tedious process of invention." It is remarkable that the very name of Christabel occurs in the metrical romance of *Sir Eglamour*, though Coleridge can hardly have known this.

National romances

The sole motive of Marie de France was the poetical ; the choice of her themes depended upon their intrinsic beauty and adaptation to poetical narrative. Another class of romance occupied itself with national or legendary heroes, and approximated more nearly to the epic. The most characteristic examples are the romances on the exploits of the national heroes Guy of Warwick and Bevis of Hampton ; but the most remarkable is that of Havelok

[1] With. [2] Many. [3] Fur.

the Dane, both from its exceptional character as a Scandinavian story, and as probably the oldest example of a metrical romance in English literature, translated though it be from the French. It appears to date in its French version from the twelfth century, in its English from the thirteenth ; but that it originates in an earlier tradition is shown by the capital of England being placed at Winchester instead of London ; and, although the legend probably goes much farther back, the general atmosphere seeming to bespeak the days of Canute, the whole working-up of the plot appears suggested by the formidable position held by Earl Godwin under the Confessor. It is the story of a double and contemporaneous usurpation of the crowns of England and Denmark, resulting, of course, in the ultimate restoration of the injured prince and princess, and their joyful reunion and fortunate reign. The dialect is East Midland with a Northern infusion. The translator says that he learned his poem from the Bretons, from whom he could only have received it through a French medium, which has not been discovered. Its assumed Breton origin is negatived by the absence of any Celtic element, whether of local colouring or local manner. One of the most certain tokens of Celtic influence (except in Ireland, whose beautiful legendary literature seems to have been unknown beyond its confines) is the employment of adultery as a leading motive. The existence of the same phenomenon in the French fiction of the present day may be adduced as a proof of the prevalence of the Celtic element over the Frankish in the ultimate constitution of the nation.

Bevis of Hampton defeated by Sir Murdour

From Copland's edition of "Syr Bevys of Hampton"

King Horn is another romance with a Scandinavian groundwork going back to the time of the expeditions of the Danish Vikings before their conversion to Christianity. Like Havelok, Horn is dispossessed of his kingdom in infancy, but recovers it. It has no great poetical merit. The French version is in the form of a *chanson de geste*. The same form was adopted for *Sir Bevis of Hampton*, while *Guy of Warwick* is a lyrical narrative. Both appear to be founded upon English traditions, appropriated by the Norman minstrels as suitable subjects, and frequently embellished by their fancy, and, when England's speech had acquired sufficient melody and flexibility, returning to her in the form of adaptations made about the time of Edward II. The English adapter was not a servile follower of his original. He would combine two sources, if

he possessed them. The author of the English romance of *Alexander*, who had before him both the Latin version of the legend in Philip Gautier's *Alexandreis*, and a French romance not identified, says in one place :—

> This batail destuted[1] is
> In the French, wel ywis.
> Therefore I have, it to colour,
> Borrowed of the Latyn autour.

Another relieves the cantos or fyttes of his narrative by prefixing little passages of his own between lyric and description, precisely as has been done in our own day, in more elaborate fashion, and with more of poetical beauty, by William Morris in his *Earthly Paradise*.

Alexander the Great and other romantic cycles

Guy of Warwick defeating the Giant

From Copland's edition of "Guy of Warwick," 1560

The romance of *Alexander*, offspring of an alliance of Greek and Oriental imagination, was perhaps more generally known throughout the Middle Ages than any other, and was, near the close of the twelfth century, the subject of a Latin epic of great merit by Philip Gautier, already mentioned. About the same time England rivalled, if she did not surpass, this work by an epic on the mediæval legend of the Fall of Troy by Josephus Iscanus (Joseph of Exeter), whom Warton calls a miracle of poetry for his age. Virgil being then chiefly known as an enchanter, the poems of Iscanus and Gautier could not fall under the ban as "faint Virgilian echoes, better burnt." Modelling themselves principally upon Statius, the bards produced poetry in most surprising contrast with the barbarous Leonines which were still in universal use for epitaphs, metrical chronicles, and congratulatory poems. We can never sufficiently regret the loss of Iscanus's *Antiocheis*, an epic on the Crusades, in which he had himself taken part. Much about the same time the Trojan romance of Dares Phrygius, a pseudonymous author of the sixth century, was naturalised in French by the poem of Benoit de Saint More, and vied with the popularity of Alexander and Arthur. These contributed to thrust the Charlemagne saga into the background ; English poetical development came too late for it, and its representatives in our literature—*Roland and Ferragus*, *Sir Otuel*, *Ferunbras*, are few and insignificant. The romance of *King Robert of Sicily*, though it could not have

[1] Imperfectly narrated.

assumed the shape in which we find it until after the Norman conquest of that island, carries us back to the legendary history of Solomon. The leading incident in both is Rabbinical, with the difference, not unimportant to the lieges, that the administration of Robert's kingdom during his absence is undertaken by an angel, and that of Solomon's by a demon. No connection can be shown between the legendary Robert and any of the historical Norman princes of the name. This list of national or professedly historical romances may be closed by the mention of one already quoted, that of *Richard Cœur de Lion*. The fusion of Norman and Saxon in the thirteenth century made this Angevin monarch, who probably could not speak English, a national hero, and the originally modest record of his exploits by a Norman minstrel was in the fourteenth century embellished by an Englishman, who introduced most of the obviously legendary element, and regarding Richard as an authentic John Bull, vilifies his hero's real countrymen, who, he says, are valiant in speech, but, when blows seem likely to supervene upon words,

> Begin to drawen in their horns
> As a snail among the thorns.

There remains a considerable class of unaffiliated romances, and others which, although connected with some cycle of romance, have not been incorporated with it. Among these latter is *Ywis and Gawain*, which, originally Celtic, passed through the medium of Chrétien de Troyes' *Knight of the Lion*, and the English rendering of this, to be restored to Welsh literature as *The Lady of the Fountain*, the first story in the Mabinogion. The story of Geraint in the Mabinogion, also originally Celtic, came back to Wales through a romance of Chrétien's, *Erec and Enide*. The contrast between these Normanised romances in the Mabinogion and the tales which preserve their original Celtic characteristics unimpaired, such as *The Dream of Rhonabwy*, *Pwyll Prince of Dyfed*, is most curious and interesting.

"Floris and Blanchefleur"

Among the miscellaneous romances which remain to be briefly noticed the most beautiful is *Floris and Blanchefleur*, which is represented in most mediæval literatures. The theory of its originally Spanish origin is inadmissible, but in its tolerance and spirit of humanity it does seem to bear traces of influence from some land where Christian and Moslem often lived in amity. Floris and Blanchefleur are foster-children, and the prince's attachment for his humbler mate is first disclosed by his refusal to learn his lessons unless Blanchefleur learns them along with him. She consequently becomes within five years mistress of Latin and of the art of writing upon parchment. When Floris insists upon wedding her she is sold into captivity; he pursues, and discovers her at the court of the Admiral (Spanish *almirante* = *emir*) of Babylon. He gains access to her, the natural consequences ensue, including detection, to have been followed by decapitation if the lovers' tenderness and devotion had not disarmed the Saracen prince :—

> His sword he braid[1] out of his sheath
> The children to have done to death

[1] Snatched.

Blanchefleur put forth her swire,[1]
And Floris agen her did tire.[2]
"I am a man, I shall go before,
Thou mightest nought my death acore."[3]
Floris forth his nekke bet,[4]
And Blanchefleur withdrew him yet.
Neither might the other thole[5]
That the other deide before.
Alle that y-seen this
Therfor sorry were iwis.
Though the Amiral wroth he were
Yet he changede his cheere,
For either would for the other die,
And he saw many weeping eye.
And, for he loved so much that may,
All weepinge he turned away.
His sword fell out of his hand to grounde,
Nor might he hold it in thikke stounde.[6]

There is also great pathos in the tale of *Amis and Amilion*, where one friend gives his children's hearts' blood to cure the other of his leprosy; and in the mediæval version of the tale of *Orpheus*, which ends happily. The story of *Sir Isumbras*, a good knight, severely punished for pride and ingratitude to the Giver, reads like an echo of the history of Nebuchadnezzar. *Sir Degrevant* has interesting pictures of manners and customs. Among the best of the remainder may be named *Ypomedon* (remarkable for its delineation of chivalric manners), *Eglamour, Emare, Triamour, The Earl of Toulouse*, and *The Kinge of Tars* [Tarsus]. This last-named romance is remarkable for a battle-scene of extraordinary vigour between the armies of the King of Tars and his would-be father-in-law, the Sultan of Damascus, and for the spirited step of the King's daughter in eloping to marry the Sultan, though he is a heathen whom she has never seen, merely to stay the effusion of blood. The scene where the converted Sultan destroys his idols evinces considerable humour, a rare excellence in English poetry until Langland and Chaucer. *The Squier of Lou Degre* is remarkable for the admission that such a person might conceivably wed a king's daughter; and for the wonderful catalogue of delights which the King of Hungary offers to his daughter to wean her from her attachment, which brings together in our view whatever was thought precious or desirable in the Middle Ages.

The Fabliau in English

While the romance flourished in England, the graceful French *fabliau* was neglected: fancy and humour had not yet become attributes of the English Muse. Two compositions of the thirteenth century, however, make a near approach to the *fabliau:* one, the little dialogue of *Siriz*, where, through the craft of an old procuress, a maiden is persuaded to hearken to the suit of a young clerk from dread of the effects of his magical arts; the other the rhymed disputation of the owl and the nightingale, which, could we suppose Milton acquainted with it, might have given him the hint of his *Allegro* and *Penseroso*.

[1] Neck. [2] Pull. [3] Feel grievously. [4] Bent.
[5] Suffer. A rare instance of assonant rhyme. [6] That same time.

Like Milton, the poet holds the balance fairly even, though with some slight inclination towards the owl, who reproaches the nightingale not merely with her frivolity but with her cheerfulness. The ascetic bent is unmistakable, the nightingale is only allowed to defend herself on ethical grounds. At last the birds agree to refer their controversy to "Nicholas of Guildford," a clerk whose virtues are so highly extolled that, if modesty were among them, he can hardly be what we might otherwise suspect him of being, the author himself. The imagination which might have turned the prolonged wrangle into a lively tale

"Ye Noble Helyas Knyghte of the Swanne" (about 1550)

is wanting, yet the poem is fluent and spirited, though the poet may seem forgetful of his own precept :—

> For harp and pipe and fowles' song
> Misliketh, if it is too long.

The dialect is southern, and the piece may well have been written at or near Guildford in the reign of Henry the Third. In a somewhat similar poem belonging to the following reign, the thrush and the nightingale dispute respecting the merits of women, the former vituperating the fair sex until she is silenced by the instance of the Virgin Mary.

Elegiac Poetry— "The Pearl"

We must pass over a century to find another example of a poem not coming under the description of romance or ecclesiastical legend or political verse ; a production, indeed, to this date almost unprecedented in English poetry. For a long time past our attention has perforce been entirely given to objective poetry, the poetry of action, or of passion intimately connected with action. Revelations of the poets' inner feelings have come by brief and fitful flashes,

no one has cared to depict the feelings of his own bosom since Anglo-Saxon bards of the earlier time meditated over Roman ruins, or complained of separation and absence. The long-neglected elegiac vein comes to light again in an anonymous poet, in all probability the author of *Gawain and the Green Knight*, who, about the middle of the fourteenth century, the very time when Petrarch is lamenting his lost Laura, bewails his own bereavement in an infant daughter. The little girl had been named Margaret, hence *The Pearl* is the title of his poem. The allegory soon disappears and gives place to genuine human feeling so powerfully expressed as to insure the writer a unique place among early English poets. Nor are his claims limited to intensity of expression; his style is his own, and he has devised a stanza of remarkable sonority, and more lyric swing and flow than we have hitherto encountered. The drawback is, as in *Gawain*, the dialectical crabbedness of his diction, which none but a very thorough scholar in Early English would easily overcome without the aid of Mr. Gollancz's careful version accompanying the original text. This harshness does not extend to the versification, which, on the contrary, gives us what we have not yet encountered in English poetry, a complicated form of twelve-line stanza, combining rhyme with alliteration, buoyed up and rendered musical by true poetical feeling. The romancers, as we have seen, can long maintain a pleasant rippling melody, like Coleridge's brook that "singeth a quiet tune," and now and then stumble upon some real metrical felicity; but, an occasional song excepted, *The Pearl* is the first example of genuine lyrical poetry, except for the nearly contemporary songs to be subsequently noticed. The cause is the same in both cases: the authors really felt what they were writing. This deep feeling accompanies the poet of *The Pearl* even when he turns aside for awhile from his sorrow to depict the halo of beauty enveloping his lost one. His imagery, indeed, is earthly; but he describes the vestibule

Illustration from "The Pearl"

From the fourteenth-century MS. in the British Museum

of Paradise, not Paradise itself, and does not, like Dante or Swedenborg, claim to be a seer. Notwithstanding the injury to his metrical effects, he must be quoted in Mr. Gollancz's version :—

> The hill-sides there were crowned
> With crystal cliffs full clear,
> And holts and woods all bright with bole
> Blue as the blue of Inde,
> And trembling leaves, thick every branch
> As burnished silver sheen.
> With shimmering sheen they glistened
> Touched by the gleam of the glades.
> And the gravel that rolled on that strand
> Was precious orient pearl.
> The sun's own light had paled before
> That sight so wondrous fair.

If the dazzle of silver and lapis-lazuli seems garish, it must be remembered that this enchanted land shines by its own light, and that its hues are chosen to harmonise with the central idea of the allegory, the lost *Pearl*.

The poem has many affinities to Dante and Petrarch, sufficiently explained by the similarity of the situation. Like the great Italians, the poet has a heavenly vision of his lost one ; but, unlike theirs, she is separated from him by an impassable river, and he does not approach her near enough to be able to say :—

> "Why ceased she speaking? why withdrew her hand?
> For, rapt to ecstasy by words like these,
> Little I wanted to have stayed in Heaven."

In Heaven, indeed, he has never been, but he has seen it afar off, and returns from its precincts consoled.

The Pearl exists in the same Cottonian MS. as *Sir Gawaine*, and was long overlooked from being blended with two other poems, *Clannesse* and *Patience*, no doubt by the same author, the first on the Old Testament narratives of the Deluge, the destruction of the Cities of the Plain, and the fall of Belshazzar ; the second on the history of Jonah. Both are in alliterative verse, and exhibit a decided reaction towards the Anglo-Saxon spirit as well as form. The description of the storm in Jonah, for instance, might well have come from a contemporary of Cynewulf :—

> From the north-east the rain begins, and
> When brisk breezes blew on those pale waters
> Rough clouds arose with fiery redness beneath.
> The sea sobbed full sore, 'twas wondrous to hear
> The winds and wan waters so wrestle together
> That the waves were wafted full wildly on high,
> And then sought the abyss where fishes do breed.
> Nowhere for roughness durst it abide
> When the blast and the brook[1] and the ruin then met.
> 'Twas a joyless craft that Jonah was in
> As it reeled around on those rough waves.

[1] This word can hardly be used in the ordinary sense.

Abaft the wave bare it that all its gear burst,
And the helm and the stern were hurled in a heap.
First many a rope and the mast then was marred.
The sail swung on the sea, the boat she had need
To drink the cold water, then rises the cry,
And they cut the cords and cast all thereout.

The sail swinging on the sea is a graphic touch derived from observation, and the poet frequently shows that he is no mere retailer of generalities. Thus, at the end of a somewhat comic description of Jonah's troubles in the whale's interior, comes a stroke of which an ordinary writer would never have thought :—

Jonah aye heard
The huge flood as it lashed the whale's back and its sides.

The author of *A Song of Merci* and other pieces printed in Furnivall's *Early English Poems* uses the metre of *The Pearl*, and also attains a genuine lyrical movement. The didactic Muse of the age is represented in *A Book of Courtesye*, showing that the age had progressed farther in courtesy than in civilisation.

Lyrical poetry

Not the least of the benefits conferred upon England by the Conquest was the opening this created for lyrical poetry. We have seen the dawn of what might have been a school of subjective lyric among the Saxons effaced by the Danish invasion. After the eighth century, unless Canute's song be an exception, we hardly meet with a trace of emotional lyric in Anglo-Saxon literature. There are lays of battle, indeed, and vestiges of ballads are imbedded in the Latin prose of William of Malmesbury. Many lays more tenderly attuned may probably have been lost, but the forms of Anglo-Saxon verse must always have been impediments to the flow of lyrical inspiration. Alliterative metre, besides its inability to satisfy the ear with a recurrence of sound, must always want the swing and cadence indispensable to lyrical poetry; nor does it admit of the ingenious rhythmical complications by which, as in Milton's version of the *Ode to Pyrrha*, this defect may sometimes be disguised, but which are seldom compatible with the utterance of really deep lyrical feeling. By bestowing rhyme on England the Norman minstrels awoke her lyric Muse from her long slumber, although her revival was very gradual. We know not how many songs may have arisen and died away upon the lips of the people before, about the middle of the thirteenth century, the anonymous author of the celebrated Cuckoo Song strikes the lyre with an easy vigour which seems to imply that he cannot have wanted for models :—

Sumer is icumen in, loud sing cuckoo !
Groweth seed and bloweth mead and springeth the wood nu !
Ewe bleateth after lamb, loweth after calve cu,
Bullock sterteth, buck verteth, merry sing cuckoo !
Cuckoo ! cuckoo !
Wel singes thu cuckoo : ne swick thu naver nu.[1]

The Love-song

While this is as genuine a lyrical inspiration as will easily be found, it

[1] Never cease.

clearly is not the first of its kind. Its popularity is evinced by its having been set to music. Had not the primitive musical compositions of the age so

Illustration from "The Pearl"

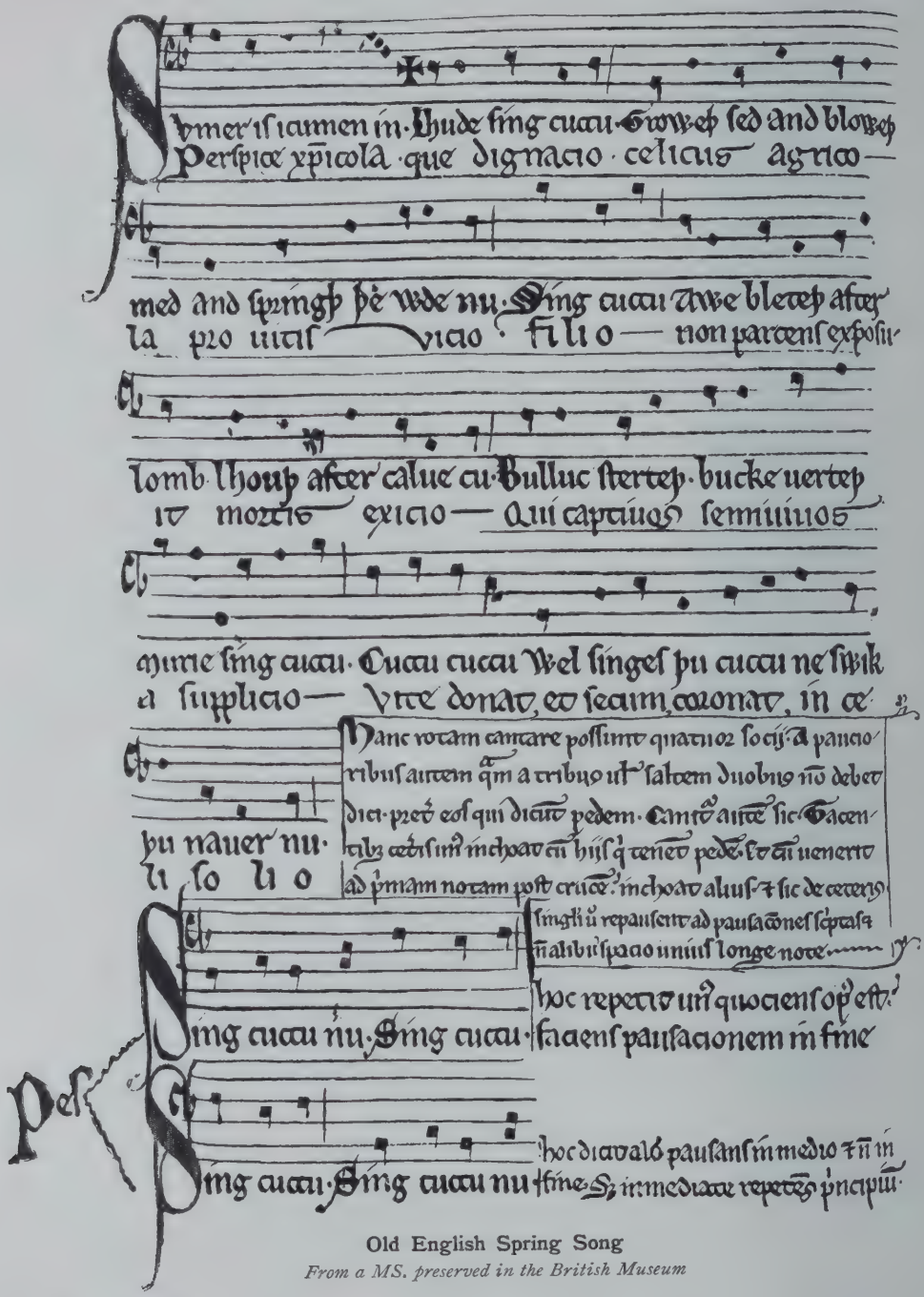
From the fourteenth-century MS. in the British Museum

generally perished, it is probable that many more songs might be retrieved from among them. Another similar waif is the pretty burden :—

Blow, northern wind,
Send thou me my sweeting.
Blow, northern wind, blow, blow, blow!

This is appended to a love poem in twelve stanzas, with which it has a merely

musical connection, and is clearly a popular refrain. Love-songs are not very numerous, and in general appear open to the same charge as the similar



Old English Spring Song

From a MS. preserved in the British Museum

compositions of the French and Provençal troubadours on which they were probably modelled; they proceed rather from the head than from the heart.

The lady would have been sung with more fervour, or sued with more persuasiveness, if she had really existed. When this essential condition is fulfilled, the poet can be moving. We quote the first stanza of *Alysoun*, evidently no mere creature of the imagination :—

Between March and Averil,
When spray begins to spring,
The little fowl hath her will
In her lud[1] to sing.
I live in love-longing
For seemliest of allé thing.
She may me blissé bring,
I am in her baundoun,[2]
An hendé[3] hap I have y-hent,[4]
I wot from heaven it is me sent,
From all women my love is lent[5]
And lit on Alisoun.

The Religious lyric

We have seen how important a part religion occupied in the thought of the people during the Anglo-Norman age. Its place in literature is, no doubt, somewhat disproportionate owing to the preponderance of the clergy, the only class whose members had for the most part received something approaching to a literary training, and from whom the ranks of authorship, minstrelsy apart, were in consequence chiefly recruited. If the number of parishes was less than now, and if the intellectual energies of Nonconformity had no existence, the balance was more than redressed by the multitude of monks and friars. The age, therefore, was not quite so religious as it seemed if judged by its literature, but enough poetry which cannot have had a merely professional origin survives to prove the reality of the religious factor in the people's intellectual life. Much more would probably have existed had congregational singing been practised, but for this there was no scope so long as the Church services continued to be in Latin. The pieces which remain are usually characterised by deep feeling and abundant contrition. We give the following *Winter Song* from Mr. Kennedy's translation of Ten Brink, who remarks that it "so closely joins reflection and perception that the whole become an image of subjective feeling" :—

Winter wakeneth all my care ;
Now the leaves wax dry and bare ;
Oft I mourn and in despair
Sigh when comes into my thought
How this world's joy it goeth all to nought.

Now it is and now no more,
As it ne'er had place before.
Man hath truly said of yore,
All goeth but God's will,
We shall all die, though it may please us ill.

[1] Lud, language. [2] Baundoun, power. [3] Hende, fair.
[4] Y-hent, taken. [5] Lent, stolen.

Sad thoughts press me sore, I ween,
When I see the fallen green.
Jesus, let thy help be seen.
Go we hence, shield us from hell ;
I know not whither I shall go nor how long here I dwell.

Political Songs

A more important department of the lyrical poetry of the age is the political, which would have formed an extensive chapter in the history of English literature if it had usually been in English. The English lyric could hardly exist until England had assimilated the Norman systems of metre and rhyme. We have seen rhyme making its way into English verse in Layamon's *Brut* at the beginning of the thirteenth century, but the alliterative system still greatly preponderates ; and Layamon was a scholar acquainted not merely with the French examples of rhyming verse, but with the sonorous, if uncouth, jingle of the monkish Leonines. There seems no extant trace of any application of rhyme to the expression of lyrical emotion for half a century, when, as is probable, the *Cuckoo Song*, already cited, was written, and, as is certain, the first known English political song was composed in exultation at the overthrow of Henry III. at the Battle of Lewes, and derision of the sorry plight of the King's brother Richard of Cornwall, who, if our rhymer may be believed, mistook a mill for a castle. The popular poetry of the age, it is to be noted, is invariably on the side of the Commons. Somewhat later, we have bold remonstrances against the excessive taxation imposed by Edward I. For a long time, nevertheless, this description of poetry is more frequently in Latin or French than in English, and not uncommonly in a curious macaronic form produced by the employment of Latin or French lines alternately with English. There can hardly have been any motive for the use of this singular mosaic but the sense of humour derived from the perception of the incongruity, and from this point of view it is a welcome symptom of the awakening of a faculty in which English literature has hitherto been deficient. After Edward II., however, popular songs in French become very rare, although a court poet, aiming to celebrate and stimulate the martial ambition of Edward III. and his barons, composes in that language his *Lay of the Heron*, a piece inspired by the most high-flown sentiments of chivalry, inciting Edward to assert his title to the crown of France.

Patriotic Poetry—Lawrence Minot

The accession of Edward III. marks a great development in English national pride and England's consciousness of herself. The former feeling had been cruelly mortified in the preceding reign by the disaster of Bannockburn. Satisfied with having, in some measure, requited this overthrow by the victory of Halidon Hill, and convinced of the impracticability of the reconquest of Scotland, the nation turned with eagerness to vindicate its *amour propre* at the expense of its most assailable neighbour. It is not unlikely that the detestation in which Edward II.'s French queen Isabella was so justly held contributed to arouse an antipathy to France of which few traces are discerned in previous ages, and which was as fully entertained by the descendants of the Norman conquerors as by those of their Saxon vassals. To the philosophic

historian Edward III.'s French wars appear equally immoral and irrational, but their effect on the national literature was most salutary. After 1328 the employment of French by English authors becomes rare; in 1362 the statutes of the realm begin to be drawn up in English; and the feeling is evidently taking root that it does not become an Englishman to express himself in any other language except, upon fit occasion, Latin. Books designed to influence public opinion, from *Piers Plowman* downwards, are now written in English; and whereas the deeds of Cœur de Lion had been celebrated by French minstrels, Edward's are sung by a North-countryman, LAWRENCE MINOT. Such, at least, is the inference as to Minot's extraction deducible from his dialect and from the frequent occurrence of his name in Yorkshire. Of his life we know nothing, but he would seem to have been a soldier with a turn for poetry, and probably a member of the circle surrounding Edward III. He wrote ten ballads on the chief military and naval events of Edward's reign down to 1352. He is a simple, unadorned, vigorous writer, an ardent but narrow patriot, with no recondite fancy or feeling, but attentive to metrical forms, of which he has a considerable variety. The following stanzas, deriding the King of France's retreat before Edward without accepting battle, are a fair specimen of his downright style :—

Our king and his men held the felde
Stalworthy, with spere and schelde,
  And thoght to win his right.
With lordes, and with knightes kene,
And other doughty men bidene
  That was ful frek[1] to fight.

When Sir Philipp of France herd tell
That King Edward in feld walld dwell,
  That gaynéd him no glee.
He trusted of no better boot,
But both on hors and on foot
  He hasted him to flee.

It seeméd he was ferd for strokes,
When he did fell his grete okes
  About his pavilyonne :
Abated then was all his pride,
For longer there he noht durst bide.
  His boast was brought all down.

A long way from this rude military minstrelsy to Boileau's stately ode on the taking of Namur, and Prior's more stinging if less dignified retort upon a change of fortune! Minot, nevertheless, deserves to live in literary history as the first English poet to celebrate English victories over foreign enemies. The circumstance that his poems have been preserved in only one manuscript suggests that he may have had competitors whose productions have failed to reach us.

Political allegories and satires

Another vent for the political feeling of the day was provided by the vision in which the course of events was foreshadowed in accordance with the poet's

[1] Eager.

wishes under the veil of prophecy, or set forth as allegory. A remarkable instance of the former is the prophecy on the history of England ascribed to St. John of Bridlington, and which, written between 1360 and 1372, continued to be regarded as an authority until after the end of the century. The growth of Lollard opinions, also, favoured the publication of metrical attacks upon the corruptions of the clergy, verse being frequently preferred to prose as more pungent and more easily committed to memory. Piers Plowman's *Crede*, already mentioned, is an example, and shows the influence of Langland's poem in effecting a temporary revival of alliterative verse. The reaction is further evinced by *The Quatrefoil of Love*, and other religious poems, and by a poem on the deposition of Richard II., the work of a zealous Lancastrian, a man of culture beyond the common if he was really acquainted with Petrarch.[1]

Metrical Chronicle. Robert of Gloucester and Robert Mannyng

These political ditties form a transition to the metrical chronicles of England produced in the same age, though nothing can be more alien from their really lyrical spirit than the dulness of the chroniclers. Two of the latter nevertheless occupy a conspicuous place by the mere bulk of their performances. ROBERT OF GLOUCESTER (about 1300) based his rhyming history upon Geoffrey of Monmouth, Henry of Huntingdon, and William of Malmesbury. It has no independent historical value until the writer arrives at his own times, when we find ourselves listening to one who has been within thirty miles of the field of Evesham on the day of Simon de Montfort's overthrow. It terminates, however, five years afterwards, although an allusion to the canonisation of Louis IX. indicates that it cannot have been written before 1297. Its poetical merit is very small, but its archæological and topographical details are frequently interesting, and it is valuable as an index to the feeling with which a patriotic Englishman of Edward I.'s time had come to regard the Norman. He is quite resigned to the Norman occupation; they will dwell here for ever, he says. He has ceased to consider the intruders as foreigners, and only regrets that French should be generally spoken by them; but the very complaint shows that he regarded English as the mother-tongue of Englishman and Norman alike, and, consequently, the Normans as Englishmen. This further intimates that England must have been well

[1] This cannot be affirmed, but there is a curious resemblance between the English poet's denunciation of the luxury of Richard II. and some lines in Petrarch's famous sonnet against the Papal Court at Avignon:—

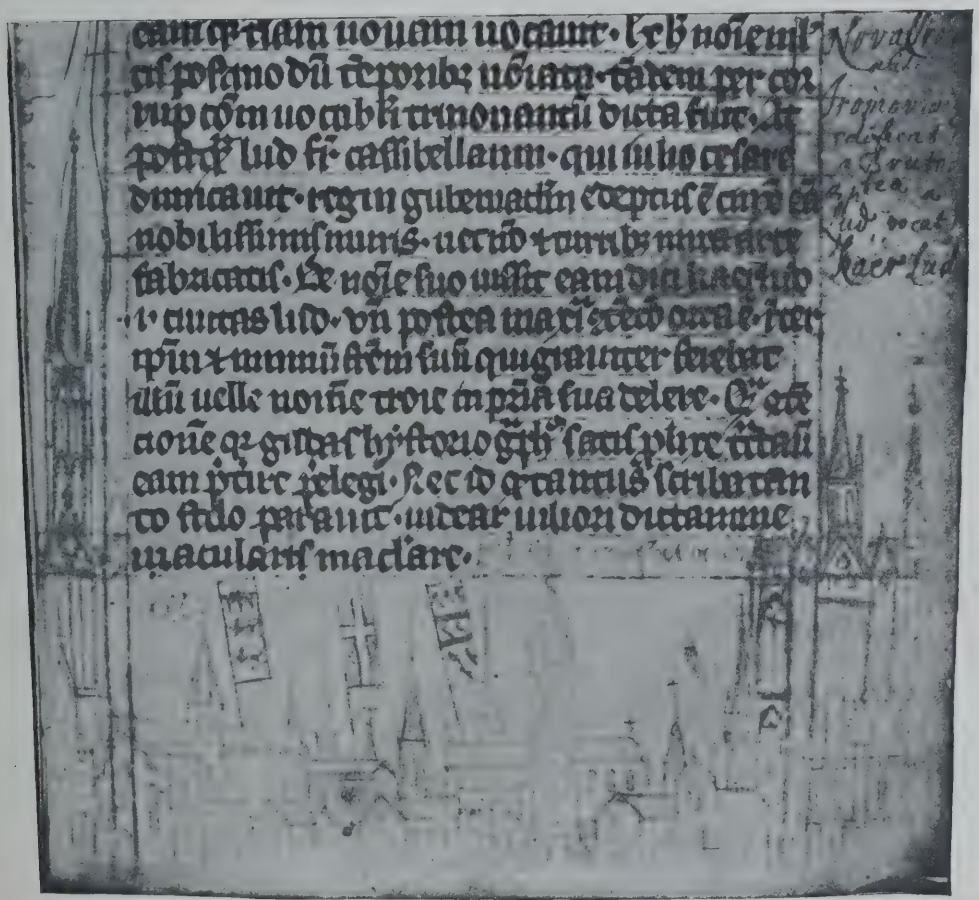
To rewle as reremys [bats],
And rest on the daies,
And spend of the spicerie
More than it nedid,
Both wexe and wyn
In wast alle aboute.
With deyntis ydoubled,
And daunsing to pypis,
In myrthe with moppis,
Myrrours of synne.

Petrarch says (Sonnet cv.):—

Nido di tradimenti, in cui si cova
Quanto mal per lo mondo oggi si spande;
Di vin serva, di letti e di vivande,
In cui lussuria fa l'ultima prova.
Per le camere tue fanciulle e vecchi
Vanno trescando, e Belzebub in mezzo
Co' mantici e col foco e co' li specchi.

leavened with Norman ideals by the end of the thirteenth century. Of Robert's life we know no more than that he was a Gloucestershire monk. His dialect is that of his native county.

The other narrative poem on English history which the age of Edward has bequeathed to us is by ROBERT MANNYNG, or BRUNNE, already mentioned as the adapter of Waddington's *Handling of Synne*, but in the main a translation from



From early fourteenth-century MS. of Geoffrey of Monmouth, with contemporary pencil sketch of London

British Museum, 13 *A.* 3

the French. Singularly enough, the original author is not a Frenchman but an Englishman, PETER OF LANGTOFT, a canon of the Augustinian Priory of Bridlington in Yorkshire. It comes down to the death of Edward I., and, though written in barbarous and ungrammatical French, would seem from Mannyng's translation and the number of MSS. preserved to have been popular in the North of England. Like Robert of Gloucester's chronicle, it is in the earlier portion a mere compilation, but is of some historical value for contemporary events, especially for Edward's wars in Scotland. Mannyng's

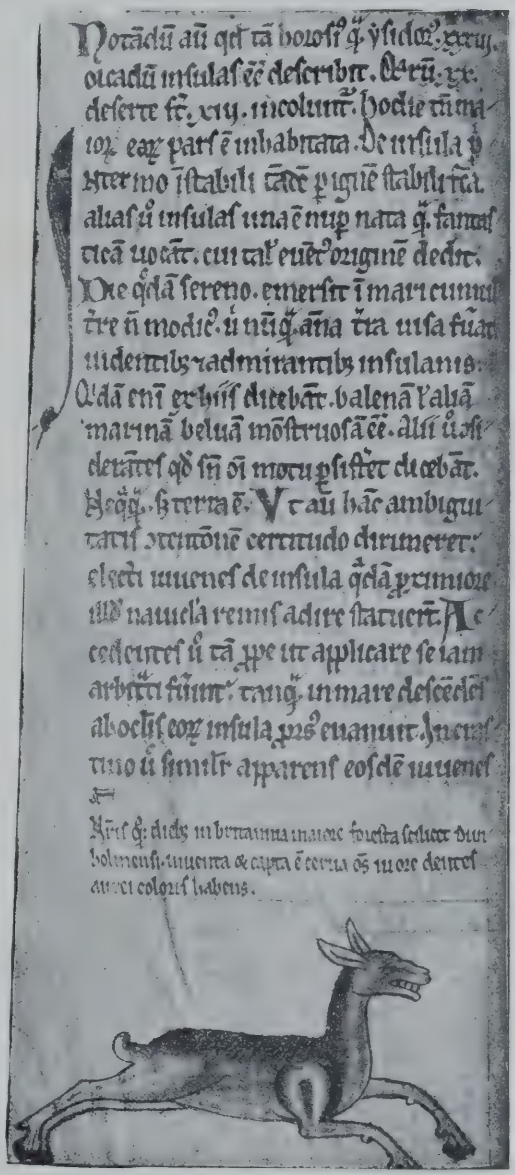
English version departs from the original in many respects, following Wace rather than Geoffrey of Monmouth. Its poetical merit is small, but its philological importance is very great, it being, with the writer's translations from Waddington and Bonaventura, the first considerable example of the Midland dialect which was to prevail over the speech of the other shires, and to furnish England with a standard of diction.

English historians writing in Latin

The historian of the early stages of a literature can rarely find much occasion to dwell upon its prose, for poetry is almost always in the van. This is easily accounted for when it is considered that most branches of prose literature require more thought and knowledge than can well exist in a generally unlettered society, and that in such a society the office of the prose writers for whom there might be room, such as the historian and the biographer, is most efficiently discharged by the poet. In modern Europe, down to a recent date, we have also to take account of a circumstance which would have astonished the ancients, the custom of literary composition in a dead language. If Anglo-Saxon literature enjoys the unique position of possessing a vernacular history in its "chronicle," the cause is not the superior enlightenment of the annalists, but their inability to write Latin. All mediæval languages, consequently, have to deplore the loss of writers who would have ranked among their greatest ornaments if they had written in the vernacular, but whom the historian of native literature is obliged to pass over. It is impossible to so much as name the mass of Latin writers who flourished in England during the Anglo-Norman period; it can only be said that, they being chiefly monks and priests, the bulk of their writings were inevitably theological or philosophical, and that when they ventured on history or poetry they commonly wrote from the point of view of their own monasteries. The age's theologians and philosophers are indispensable for the comprehension of its intellectual activity, and the chroniclers for its history, but neither fall strictly within the province of the literary historian. Five eminent men, however, have produced works, which though not originally English have become so by translation, and are read with interest and pleasure at this day. These, therefore, seem to demand a brief notice, and may be taken as representatives of the crowd of minor historical writers.

William of Malmesbury (1093–1143) was brought up in the great abbey of Malmesbury, of which he became librarian, and might have been abbot if he had desired. His writings show him to have been far above the average of his time in learning and literary ability. Under him the long-neglected art of historical composition revived; he is the first English historian after Beda entitled to a higher rank than that of analyst. The merit, indeed, of one of his chief works, the *Gesta Regum*, a history of England from 449 to 1125, is rather literary than historical until it approaches his own times, copying his predecessors in matters of fact, but full of stories of the most dissimilar character excellently told. His appendix to this work, the *Historia Novella*, is our principal authority for the reign of Stephen; and his *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum* has been described as "the foundation of the early ecclesiastical history of England, on which all writers have chiefly built."

The claims of **Geoffrey of Monmouth**, Bishop of St. Asaph (1100?–1154), are of quite another kind. Though appearing in the guise of an historian, his true character is that of the great romancer of his age. It does not follow that he intentionally practised deception; he may well have believed the Celtic legends with which his *History of the Britons* is crowded, for the preservation of which we are infinitely obliged to him. The extremely important and beneficial part performed by his history as a means of allaying race animosities by persuading the various nations inhabiting Britain of their common origin, and its value as a treasury of themes for poets and romancers, have been dwelt upon in our account of Layamon's *Brut*. Geoffrey, who only became a priest and bishop in his latter years, is represented as a man of great accomplishments. The question whether he was the more credulous or mendacious did not occur to his contemporaries as a subject for inquiry, but was decided in the less favourable sense by the two next historians on our list. William of Newburgh censures him magisterially; and Giraldus Cambrensis, anticipating Arbuthnot's maxim that a lie is best refuted by a bigger lie, narrates the case of one obsessed by evil spirits, who obtained relief when the Gospel of St. John was laid upon his breast, "but if the *History of the Britons* was substituted, they instantly reappeared in greater numbers, and remained a longer time than usual on his body and on the book."



Page from fourteenth-century MS. of Giraldus Cambrensis

British Museum, 13 *B.* 8

Geoffrey might well be antipathetic to **William of Newburgh** (1136–1198), for William is so eminently the English philosophical historian of the Middle Ages as to have gained from Professor Freeman the title of "the father of historical criticism." His history of England, which covers the period of his own life with a short introduction from the Conquest downwards, shows a power of weighing evidence, a breadth of view, and an independence of judgment most unusual in his age, and not too common in any.

He exhibits all the qualities of a statesman, but there is no indication of his having ever left his monastery.

Giraldus de Barry, commonly known as **Giraldus Cambrensis** (1146?–1220?), was one of the most picturesque and original characters of his age. His agitated life was mainly passed in contests for the bishopric of St. David's, to which the chapter would have elected him, but from which the king and the Archbishop of Canterbury successfully debarred him. The dispute was partly political, the Welsh desiring a bishop of their own nationality, a condition fulfilled by Giraldus in virtue of his birth in Pembrokeshire and his descent from a princely Welsh family on the mother's side.

From MS. Life of Offa by Matthew Paris

British Museum, Cotton. MS. Nero D 1

His autobiography, *De rebus a se gestis*, is entertaining and valuable but his best known work is the *Itinerarium Cambriae*, an account of his journey with Archbishop Baldwin to preach the crusade in Wales, and of the effect produced by his own Latin sermons, unintelligible as these were to the hearers. In the interval of his favour with Henry II. he visited Ireland and composed a topographical description of the country and a history of the English conquest.

Giraldus was a man of parts and learning, but scarcely an historian. **Matthew Paris** (1200?–1259) is not merely an historian, but, what his country never knew before him, the official representative of the history of his age. Brought up in the scriptorium of the abbey of St. Albans, the calligrapher matured into the historiographer, and when it became known that the chronicler's office had passed from the hands of the worthy but arid Roger of Wendover into those of a scholar and man of the world, Matthew came to fill a position somewhat analogous to that enjoyed in our day by a representative of a foreign journal at a great capital. All, from the king downwards, were ambitious of his good word, and it says much for him that with all the influences

brought to bear upon him he should have written with so much independence. His outlook upon the world is wider than that of any of his predecessors, he records contemporary transactions in foreign countries, dwells on natural phenomena, and illustrates his manuscripts with drawings of interesting objects, which if executed by his own hand, as is most probably the case, prove him to have been a gifted artist. But his highest title to fame is that of the patriotic historian who, though a favourite with King Henry III. and personally attached to him, represented the transactions of his reign as they really were, protesting indignantly against the spoliation of Church and State for the enrichment of foreign countries and ecclesiastics and the continual encroachments upon popular liberties. Paris's history covers the period from 1235 to 1259; he also revised the chronicles of St. Albans from the Conquest to his own time, and made an abridgment of his own history.

These eminent men had one point in common between themselves and less distinguished writers: they were not professional men of letters. Authorship was an accident of their career, imposed upon them by the circumstances of their lives or the particular office they might fill; the profession to which they looked for a livelihood was almost invariably the ecclesiastical. Literature as a profession was evidently impossible in the absence of a reading class, and it is easy to discern how greatly the intellectual culture of the age must have suffered from the want of it. In course of time, however, a rival to the monastery arose in the university. Italy took the lead with her University of Bologna, but in the twelfth century the schools of France were the most important, and the mutual collision of the young minds which resorted to them, apart from the special knowledge acquired, must have done much to liberate the long enslaved intellect of the Western world. England was behindhand, but about 1136 we find JOHN OF SALISBURY, author of standard works on statesmanship and logic, and perhaps the nearest approach to the character of a genuine man of letters that the age produced, studying at Paris and Chartres. A little later the Italian scholar Vacarius visits Oxford to lecture on law, but is impeded by the king; about 1170 another Italian, Irnerius, mighty in the newly-retrieved Pandects, holds at Oxford what is hardly distinguishable from a professor's chair. Still there is no university, properly speaking, but Oxford and Cambridge struggle gradually into corporate existence, and the former at least may, as a national institution, be deemed contemporary with Magna Charta (1215). This is a great step towards the emancipation of thought, and the rather as it coincides with a similar movement throughout the Continent, and inasmuch as the holders of high office in the Church are for the future most commonly university students, who come to their dignities imbued with academical ideals and traditions. Of these the most remarkable was ROBERT GROSSETESTE, the patriotic and anti-Italian Bishop of Lincoln (1175 ?–1253), who, having been Chancellor of Oxford, stood stoutly by the students throughout his stormy episcopal career, helping them out of scrapes and obtaining for them new privileges. Grosseteste, like John of Salisbury, nearly approaches the modern character of a man of letters, much of his voluminous work having no special professional imprint, but being undertaken for the pure love and sole sake of

The Universities

culture. This is even more conspicuously the case with a yet more famous Oxonian, who makes no pretension to rank among men of letters, ROGER BACON (1214–1292.) Roger did not possess, or could find no field to employ, the literary genius of his more celebrated namesake, but seems to have had an equally firm hold upon the capital truth that knowledge comes of observation.

Amalgamation of the Norman with the Saxon race

Towards the close of the fourteenth century the apparent amalgamation of Norman and Saxon was put to a rude test. A large proportion of the peasantry of the southern counties, goaded into revolt by oppression, rose against the aristocracy and the representatives of legal authority, and spread fire and pillage over the land. These men were almost all of Saxon descent. Had any race hatred survived, their animosity would have been directed against the Normans in particular, but of this there is no sign. Their enemies are the rich and powerful of whatever extraction. There are no longer Normans or Saxons, only Englishmen. They kill the Flemings indeed, but the Flemings are accounted foreigners. The two literatures stand on the brink of a similar amalgamation. The foreign speech has died out as a distinct language, but the foreign forms and ideals of which it was the vehicle remain, and will dominate English literature for the future. On the other hand, the plain robust vernacular of England, after exhibiting numerous dialectical variations, has at length won its way to a diction accepted by all south of the Tweed as the pure standard of English, yet needing a greatly enriched vocabulary, which, the power of evoking new words having departed from it, is obtainable only by recourse to French and Latin. This needful appropriation had already gone far; it was to go still farther, and to be in a manner consecrated by the example of the only writer of great literary genius that England had yet produced. In our next chapter we shall trace the confluence of the Norman and the Saxon literary currents in Geoffrey Chaucer, who not merely summed up in himself the literary influences already existing in his country, but brought in a new and important factor from another foreign literature, the youngest of any, and yet the only one that could claim to rank as classical—the literature of Italy.

CHAPTER V

CHAUCER

We have thus far accompanied English literature through many phases of immaturity as the literature of a nation, and have reached the point where it first shows symptoms of becoming a chief literature of the world. The productions we have hitherto considered possess a deep national and historical interest for the Briton, and deserve, as they have received, the closest attention from foreign scholars and philologists. They have contained, however, little that natives, and much less that foreigners, would read for the mere pleasure of perusal, apart from the subsidiary aims of information, linguistic research, or insight into the national character. The power of delighting for its own sake is the true test of literary merit, and rarely until the latter part of the fourteenth century is an English book able to sustain it. The appearance of Chaucer marks the admission of the English to rank among the literatures destined and deserving to be known beyond their national limits, and to influence the literature of foreign countries. The formal recognition of this eminence was, indeed, to be delayed for centuries, but no well-informed Frenchman or Italian or German now disputes that England took rank among the foremost literary countries when she produced Geoffrey Chaucer.

Chaucer a personification of the union of races and languages in England

Her intellectual reputation, indeed, already stood high. John of Salisbury, Grosseteste, Roger Bacon, were probably as greatly esteemed abroad as any foreign writers in their respective departments. Oxford and Cambridge, if not so influential as the more favourably situated University of Paris, were still renowned and visited from afar. But no Englishman had gained a great name in elegant letters, and it was hardly possible that he should. As we have seen, our language consisted of two elements which must coalesce to make a fit vehicle for literature, and whose fusion must be a work of time. On one side the speech of Saxondom, the massive groundwork of the language, but which had lost the power of self-development, and could only enrich its inadequate vocabulary by appropriations from a foreign source; on the other this source itself, the Norman French, adequate for most literary needs, but which, without aid from the Saxon, could no more become national than without its aid the Saxon could become copious. The assimilation so essential to both had long been progressing, and the period of complete fusion was

happily signalised by the birth of a poet not merely competent to use the newly moulded instrument as a language, but to enrich language by trophies won from foreign literature, and not only a poet and a scholar, but such an observer of human nature, such a depicter of characters and creator of types as no modern country but Italy had yet seen. All the chief elements both of the Anglo-Saxon and the Anglo-Norman characters which we have endeavoured to describe were represented in Chaucer's opulent nature, and the union of the races and the literatures was personified in him.

Edward III

From the bronze effigy in Westminster Abbey

Chaucer's family and youthful history

Geoffrey Chaucer was probably born about 1340—the year before the formal recognition of literature as a matter of public concern by the coronation of Petrarch in the Capitol, and three years after the preferring of Edward III.'s claim to the crown of France, a step in itself neither just nor politic, but contributing more than anything else to make Saxon and Norman feel as one under the influence of a common cause and a common glory. In 1340 Edward for the first time assumed the title of King of France and quartered the French arms; and 1340 beheld the first considerable English naval victory; if it also saw the birth of the first English poet of European fame, it was indeed an epoch-making year.

Chaucer's father, John Chaucer, the son of one Robert Chaucer, who had been a collector of customs, was a vintner who also at one time held an appointment as deputy collector at Southampton, and must have been a man of substance, as in 1366 he is found disposing of a considerable property in Aldgate. He lived in Thames Street at the foot of Dowgate Hill, where, in all probability, the poet was born. The name connected with the French *chaussier*, a shoemaker, as Fletcher is with *fléchier*, but like this, far from implying French descent, was not uncommon at the time. A derivation from *chaffuecire* = *chaffwax*, or melter of wax for use in official documents, seems less probable. The family belonged to the Eastern counties, having property at Ipswich, and, as John Chaucer used armorial bearings, must have had pretensions to

gentle blood. John Chaucer is found in attendance upon Edward III. in his expedition to Flanders in 1338. This connection with the court might help him to obtain for his son a page's place in the household of Prince Lionel, Edward's third son, to which some fragments of an account-book discovered by Sir Edward Bond prove him to have belonged in 1357. In 1359 Chaucer took part in Edward's invasion of France, was made prisoner, and was ransomed by the King in March 1360. If the money came out of Edward's treasury, some value must have been attached to Chaucer's services. He soon afterwards, possibly upon occasion of his patron Lionel becoming in 1361 Viceroy of Ireland, whither Chaucer certainly did not accompany him, entered the King's household as "valettus" or yeoman of the chamber, and in 1367 is found receiving a special pension in addition to his salary. It seems reasonable to connect this grant with his marriage to Philippa, described as Philippa Chaucer in a list of the Queen's ladies in 1366. She may have been a kinswoman, but was more probably his wife, as he certainly was married to a lady named Philippa by 1374. Of her supposed connection with the Roes family we shall speak later. From the general tenour of his writings it must be feared that as a husband he was neither very constant nor very happy.

His mission in Italy

In November 1372 an event occurred which had the greatest influence on the development of Chaucer's genius. This was a mission on which he was despatched to Italy, along with two Genoese merchants, to treat respecting the formation of a Genoese commercial establishment in England. His selection for such a commission shows that he must have been regarded as a competent man of business, and almost justifies the supposition that he was then acquainted with Italian, and already possessed some knowledge of Italy. Considering that his first master, Lionel, Duke of Clarence, had in 1367 married Violante, daughter of Galeazzo Visconti, Duke of Milan, it would appear highly probable that Chaucer had been brought into contact with Italians, and it would be in no respect surprising if he had formed one of the brilliant train which accompanied Lionel to Italy on occasion of his marriage. If this was the case, Chaucer may probably have met Petrarch, who is related to have been among the wedding guests, though the statement has been doubted from its not being confirmed by his own authority. If Chaucer was not already interested in Italian literature, he speedily became so. The Clerk of Oxford, who narrates the story of Griselda in *The Canterbury Tales*, says that he got it from "a worthy clerk at Padowe,"

> Fraunceys Petrak, the laureate poete,

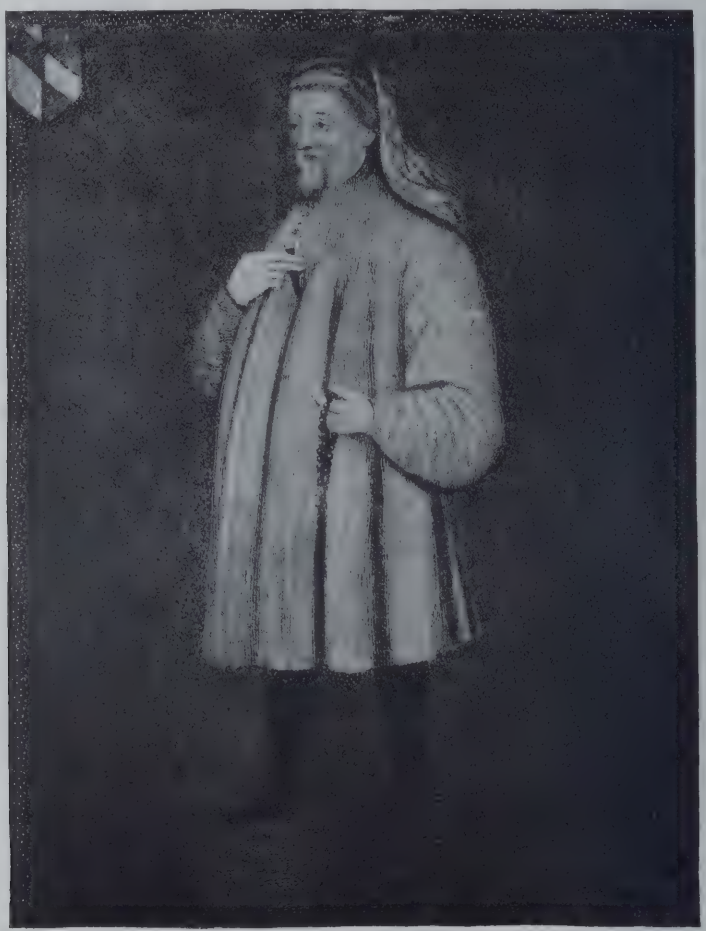
and in fact it is mainly a rendering from Petrarch's version.

In 1373, the year when Chaucer was in Italy, Petrarch translated the story into Latin from Boccaccio's *Decameron*, and sent the translation to Boccaccio, who then lived at Certaldo, near Florence, which city, as appears from an order for the payment of his expenses, Chaucer also visited upon the King's business. He would be very likely to make the acquaintance of Boccaccio, and may have seen the manuscript in his hands. If he had already met Petrarch at Prince Lionel's wedding, it is not impossible that he may have journeyed farther to visit him at Padua or Arquà, though the disturbed state of Italy might create difficulties which would not impede his meeting with Boccaccio. In any case Chaucer opens the list of illustrious English poets who have been deeply influenced by Italy. Few men of genius have had more in common than he and Boccaccio.[1]

[1] Landor introduces Chaucer into the company of Petrarch and Boccaccio in one of his Imaginary Conversations, but, being under a wrong impression as to the English poet's age, sets chronology at defiance.

His various fortune

Chaucer's discharge of his mission must have given satisfaction, for after his return in the autumn of 1373 we find him in continual receipt of tokens of the royal benevolence. The most important is his appointment as comptroller of the customs duties on wools, skins, and leathers in the port of London; the most curious is the allotment for his consumption of a pitcher of wine a day, afterwards commuted into a pension of twenty marks. Both these were bestowed in 1374, in which year also he



Geoffrey Chaucer

From the portrait in the National Portrait Gallery

entered on the leasehold occupa ion of the dwelling-house over Aldgate Gate, where he dwelt for twelve years. In 1376 and the three years following he is employed on a variety of foreign missions; one to Milan, which strengthens the probability that Lombardy was not strange to him. In 1380 he seems to have been concerned in some mysterious proceedings connected with the abduction of a lady; at all events, a document exists by which Cecilia Chaumpaigne discharges Galfridus Chaucer from all legal proceedings, "whether on account of my carrying off (*raptu*) or any other causes which I have or may have had from the beginning of the world until this

present" The matter is entirely obscure; it can only be affirmed that it entailed no loss of character upon Chaucer, for in 1382 he was appointed to another comptrollership, and in 1386 was elected knight of the shire for Kent. But at the end of the year he was suddenly deprived of both his comptrollerships. The romantic stories of the old biographers of his flight to Zealand, his return and imprisonment, and his ultimate release at the instance of Anne of Bohemia, are refuted by the fact that, until (1388)

Chaucer's Grave in Westminster Abbey

compelled by his necessities to assign his pension to another, he continued to draw it regularly and give receipts in person. His dismissal was, no doubt, connected with the proceedings of a commission appointed in November 1386 to search out abuses in the revenue departments. Such inquisitions easily find what they desire to find, and it can hardly be doubted that pretexts would be sought for removing the actual incumbents to make room for the favourites of King Richard's turbulent uncle, the Duke of Gloucester, who had just gained power by a revolution. That abuses did exist may well be believed. Chaucer, as we shall see, had been busy writing poetry between 1372 and 1386, and had recently obtained leave to perform his official duties by deputy.

On King Richard's regaining his authority in 1389, Chaucer, though not reappointed

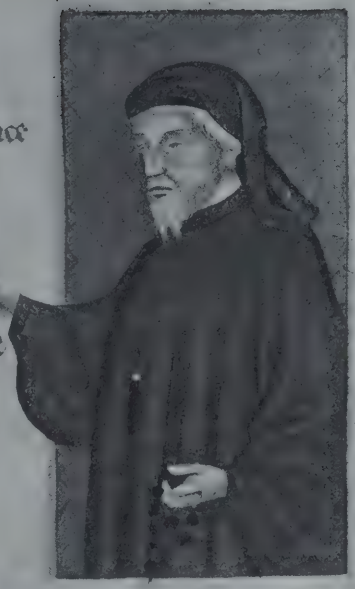
to his old places, received a new one of importance, that of clerk of the works at the palace of Westminster and several other royal residences. This, too, he was permitted to discharge by deputy, but the deputy must have needed supervision almost as much as the duties, and Chaucer can have been little fitted to control either. Within two years he lost his office, the fall being broken in some measure by his appointment as fore-ter in Somersetshire (if, indeed, the Geoffrey Chaucer on whom the post was conferred be rightly identified with the poet), and by a pension of £20 from the King. His frequent requests at this time for an advance on his pension seem to indicate much pecuniary difficulty, and he must have apprehended being harassed with lawsuits, since he obtained exemption from all civil proceedings against him for two years. Richard, a liberal monarch, but too profuse to be always bountiful in the right place, did no more for him; but Henry IV., within four days after his accession, mindful of Chaucer's special devotion to the House of Lancaster, and moved by an appeal from the poet, more than doubled his pension, and by the end of the year Chaucer, restored to the prospect of comfort, takes a long lease of a house in the garden of the Lady Chapel, Westminster, where Henry VII.'s chapel now stands. In the following February he receives his old pension, but the next payment is made to an official on his behalf, and the inference must be that he had already begun to suffer from mortal disease. According to the inscription on his tomb (not erected, however, until 1555) he died on October 25, 1400. All know his sepulchre in Westminster Abbey.

Chaucer's wife is believed to have died about 1387. The question about her origin is mixed up with the further question, whether Thomas Chaucer, chief butler to Richard II. and Henry IV., and several times Speaker of the House of Commons, was the poet's son. His tomb bears the arms of the family of Roet, to which belonged Catherine Swinford, long the mistress and ultimately the wife of John of Gaunt: it is thought that these must have been his mother's arms, and that Chaucer's favour with John of Gaunt would be explained by his wife's relationship to Catherine Swinford. It further appears that he used a seal engraved with the arms which appear on Chaucer's tomb in Westminster Abbey. But these were *not* the arms of Chaucer's father, and as the tomb was not erected until 1555, it is highly probable that they were merely carved because they were known to be the arms of Thomas Chaucer. If Thomas was Chaucer's son, it is to be feared that he was an unnatural one, for the period of his rise into fortune through a wealthy marriage and a lucrative office corresponds with that of Geoffrey Chaucer's sorest pecuniary troubles, which there is no hint of Thomas having relieved. In fact, notwithstanding the weighty testimony of Gascoigne, brought to light by Professor Hales, the identification seems as yet insufficiently supported, and the case for it is further weakened by the absence of any allusion to Thomas Chaucer in the elder Chaucer's writings. He does acknowledge a son Lewis, perhaps a natural son, since he was only ten in 1391, or possibly in 1393, when Chaucer composed his treatise on the astrolabe for his use. Mr. Edward Scott's interesting discovery that Thomas Chaucer succeeded as occupant of Chaucer's house almost proves that he was a near relative, but not that he was his son.

Chaucer's position in English literature

Chaucer is neither a Homer nor a Dante, but his position in regard to English literature is analogous to that which they occupy towards the literature of their respective countries. Each was the first poet of his nation, not indeed the first who had ever written poetry, but the first who had so written poetry as to command the attention of contemporaries and of posterity. As Mahomet professed of himself, they divide an age of light from an age of comparative ignorance. Each, moreover, is

Holde he ȝ̄ fraunce was mayden meke
And lat his lone floure and fructifie



All porȝh his lyfe be queynt pe resemblaunce
Of him hay in me so fressh lyfhynesse
Pat to putte othir men in remembraunce
Of his p̄sone ȝ haue heere his lyknesse
Do make to yis ende in ostisfactuesse
Pat yei p̄ haue of him left pought & mynde
By yis peynture may ayeyn him fynde

These ymages p̄ in ȳ chirche been
Maken folk penke on god & on his seyntes
Whan pe ymages yei be holden & seen
Were oft cause of siem amsith restreyntes
Of poughtes goode whan a ping depeynt is
Or entended if men take of it heede
Thoght of pe lyknesse it wil in hym brede

Yit some holden oppynyon and sey
Pat none ymages schuld ȝ maked be
Yei erren foule & goon out of pe wey
Of trouth haue yei stronge sensibilite
Passe oth p̄ noght blessid remembre
Vppon my maistres soule mey haue
ffor him lady eke ȳ mey ȝ crave

Wore othir ping wolde ȝ fayne speke & touche
Heere in yis booke but ofmich is my entencion
ffor p̄ al wore ans empty is my pouche
Pat al my lust is queynt p̄ hevynesse
And hevy spirite comaundeth stilnesse

Portrait of Chaucer from Thomas Hoccleve's Poem "De Regimine Principum."
Early XVth Century.

[*Harleian MS.* 4866, *British Museum.*]

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thoroughly national. Homer, so far as we can pierce the obscurity surrounding his personality, appears as the typical Greek, Dante is an Italian of the Italians, Chaucer is to the core an Englishman. The great distinction between Chaucer and the poets of the very highest rank, and the chief cause of his inferiority to these, is his lack of originality. If, as is probable, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are combined out of more ancient ballads, the combiner at all events stamped his own individuality upon them as vividly as Shakespeare stamped his upon the historical materials which he derived from the old English chroniclers. Dante is the most intensely original of all poets. But Chaucer imitates and translates. One of his most important works is an adaptation from the Italian, another is a translation from the French. Without French and Italian examples he would have achieved comparatively little. His place, therefore, is not with the supreme poets, but rather with the Virgils and Ovids who, discarding the old Latin forms as Chaucer discarded the alliterative metres, and imbuing themselves with the spirit of Greek literature as he imbued himself with French and Italian, produced a literature derivative indeed, but hardly less important than its original. In both cases this lay in the nature of things. Rome was to govern the world, and her literature could not be widely separated from that which had permeated the life and moulded the civilisation of the great majority of her subjects. If Chaucer's receptiveness impaired his independence, it made him more truly a representative of that fusion of elements originally conflicting, English literature.

Like most great English writers, Chaucer belonged to the middle class, and hence was advantageously placed for interpreting the higher and lower orders to each other. Like Shakespeare, he was well acquainted with the life of the inferior classes, beheld it with genial condescension, entered into its humours with genuine enjoyment, but preferred the more aristocratic society to which fortune and his abilities had introduced him. One plain reason is that both Chaucer and Shakespeare wrote in the main for cultivated audiences. The great success of Langland's *Piers Plowman* shows that even in that age a poet might find a public among the humbler orders of his countrymen; but, to emulate Langland, Chaucer must have renounced all the departments of poetry for which he felt the most especial vocation. We hence find him the self-conscious laureate of a courtly circle. As Professor Minto remarks, the idea of chivalrous love is always present with him, and even in *The Canterbury Tales*, where the machinery compels him to represent the humours of every order of society, he is careful to demarcate the gentles from the plebeians, and apologises to the former for the despite which realism occasionally compels him to offer to refinement. This gives Chaucer a highly interesting position, and justifies a comparison in one respect between him and a very dissimilar poet, Dante. As Dante has embodied mediæval ideals in the regions of theology and philosophy for us at the moment when they had obtained most apparent consistency, but also at the moment when they were at the point of passing away, so Chaucer has embodied chivalry in the age of its greatest splendour, the age of Edward III., just as the invention of gunpowder and the growing power of the mercantile class were about to bring it down. Like Dante, then, Chaucer both closes and opens an era; and, although the father of modern English poetry, he is not, like his great contemporary Petrarch, a modern man.

His character

We are warranted in regarding Chaucer's character in a most favourable light. The little that could possibly be brought against him is so obscure that it might entirely disappear in presence of more accurate knowledge. We seem to perceive dimly some traces of unsatisfactory relations with his wife, without being able to fix blame on either

party. The affair of Cecilia Chaumpaigne is mysterious; it may have been a money matter; all we know for certain is that the lady thought she had good reasons for taking legal proceedings, and still better reasons for dropping them. It might even be doubted whether the Chaucer of this episode was our Chaucer, though the identity seems to be confirmed by the weight and rank of the persons who appear as witnesses. It is nevertheless worth remarking that if, as we are disposed to think, Thomas Chaucer, the chief butler, was not the son of the poet, there must have been another family of the name of Chaucer of consideration at the time, and that Geoffrey was a common christian-name. For the rest, we know Chaucer principally from the hints and glimpses he affords of himself, and the light which his own descriptions of man and nature afford as to his habitual way of looking upon the world. The most conspicuous trait is a devotion to study, combined, nevertheless, with other characteristics not always prominent in a scholar—aptitude for courts, fondness for external nature, and shrewd observation of mankind. He seems to have known how to retain the favour of his patrons, and must have possessed some diplomatic tact to have been employed upon so many confidential missions. If he failed as an official the reason may well have been that his functions rendered him responsible for the keeping of complicated accounts, the last thing to be expected from a poet. His love of scenery and outdoor life is fully apparent from his writings, and we have his own testimony that when Nature put on her best dress she could woo him away even from his books:

> There is game none
> That fro my bokis maketh me to gone,
> But it be seldome, on the holyday;
> Save certainly when that the month of Maie
> Is comen, and I here the foulis syng,
> And that the flouris ginnen for to sprynge,
> Farewell my boke and my devocion.

But, though he must have enjoyed the spectacle of a tournament, there is no trace of any addiction to rough and violent sports. As an observer of men and manners, Chaucer is equally delightful for his shrewdness and his sympathetic charity. He is at home with every one, and has a kindly word for all. He views the world as a humorist, but not as a jester; he is never frivolous and seldom sarcastic; he notes faults and foibles, but looks on everything a little more favourably than it quite deserves. On the whole, a man in whom Shakespeare would have delighted, and one who could only have gained in proportion as he was known. Intellectually he is of his age, and yet beyond his age; a humanist without pedantry, a man of the type of Petrarch, Erasmus, and Boccaccio, but especially Boccaccio.

It will now be desirable to state the probable chronological order and approximate dates of Chaucer's genuine works, which are nearly as follows.

Chaucer's early writings

The earliest extant is *The Book of the Duchess*, which had probably been preceded by a translation of Guillaume de Machault's *History of the Lion*, now lost. The *Book* is shown by internal evidence to be an elegy on Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, the first wife of John of Gaunt, who died in September 1369, which must consequently be the date of the poem. On a comparison between this and the genuine portion of the translation of *The Romaunt of the Rose*, the latter, as the better poem, would seem to be the more recent.

About 1369 Chaucer was under the influence of the French poets, whose metres were commonly octosyllabic. It was not until his visit to Italy in 1372–1373 that the genius of Italian poetry captivated him, and that he began to form his works upon Italian models. It is true that he did not even then discard the octosyllabic line, but it may well be doubted if he would then have ventured upon so extensive an undertaking as the rendering of the entire *Roman de la Rose* in it. His version, accordingly, of which but a portion remains, may be placed with probability between 1369 and 1372.

The *Complaint unto Pity* was probably written about this time, although the great innovation which distinguishes it, the introduction of the "rime royal" or seven-lined stanza employed in our own day with such effect by William Morris, might seem to denote a date after Chaucer's visit to Italy. But even if he had not, as may be suspected, already accompanied Prince Lionel on his nuptial expedition in 1367, the stir which the event would occasion in court circles would be likely to induce a courtier with a gift for poetry to interest himself in the Italian language and literature, and his studies would not proceed far without convincing him how much English metre needed improvement. There is, indeed, no token of the slightest obligation on his part to any English poetical predecessor, except as affording him a theme for parody. Although the "rime royal," adopted by him from Guillaume de Machault, but made completely his own by the frequency of his use, being simply the Italian octave deprived of its sixth line, wants the symmetrical balance of its model, it may be questioned whether the modification does not adapt it even better to the purposes of narrative poetry. It is a pleasing and by no means unlikely conjecture that Chaucer's yearning for Italy, whether previously visited by him or not, may have led him to be despatched on his errand of 1372, when the length of his stay seems to prove that he must have had other concerns to occupy him than the affairs of the Genoese merchants.

House at Woodstock occupied, according to tradition, by Chaucer

His translation of the "Roman de la Rose"

The date, and even the authenticity, of Chaucer's translation of the *Roman de la Rose* are questions of some difficulty. That he did translate it we know from his own statement in *The Legend of Good Women*, written about 1385. Three extensive fragments, attributed to him in the MSS., have come down to us. The genuineness of all has been questioned, on the ground of a difference in dialect from that of his other writings, and of a discrepancy from the ordinary pattern of his rhymes. Professor Skeat, our highest modern

authority, is so much inclined to lay stress on this kind of evidence that we may accept his opinion that it does not apply to the first of these fragments, comprising lines 1–1705. It may be added that the poetry is here better than that of the other portions, possessing a certain aroma difficult to characterise, but perceptibly absent from the latter part of the poem. This might certainly be accounted for on the supposition that Chaucer was becoming tired of his long labour, but, taken in connection with the philological and metrical tests, seems sufficient to establish a case against the authenticity of the suspected passages. The merit of the genuine portion is such as to render it hard to ascribe this to any one but Chaucer, and suggests that it must have been written after *The Book of the Duchess*, while it would seem to be unaffected by the Italian influences which pervaded Chaucer's work after his visit to Italy in 1372–73. It may have been commenced shortly before this mission, interrupted by it, and completed by another hand. From Chaucer's way of speaking of it, it would seem to have been published as his work, whether entirely from his hand or not.

Other narrative poems

If *The Romaunt of the Rose* was not the first work which occupied Chaucer after his return from Italy, he probably then employed himself upon another unfinished poem, *The House of Fame*. Like the *Romaunt*, this is written in octosyllabic couplets, a form with which, as the work proceeds, the writer appears to express some dissatisfaction, which may have prevented him from completing it. It seems, at all events, unlikely that he would have recurred to this inferior form after his success in handling his own invention, the "rime royal." *Troylus and Cryseide*, the most important of his works after *The Canterbury Tales*, is, to the extent of about a third, adapted from the *Filostrato*, the poem which Boccaccio had written in his youth to impeach the inconstancy of his mistress. It seems probable that something in Chaucer's own situation rendered this subject congenial to him. The poem also contains clear indications of influence from Dante and Petrarch, and from Boccaccio's other epic, *La Teseide*. This latter work is the basis of another and even more celebrated poem of Chaucer's, the *Palamon and Arcite*, which, as *The Knight's Tale* occupies in every sense the first place among *The Canterbury Tales*. The original form and date of this poem are subjects of controversy. Chaucer tells us in his *Legend of Good Women* (1385) that he had already written

> al the love of Palamon and Arcyte
> Of Thebes, though the story is knowen lyte.

This would accord with the existence of some fragments of what would seem to be an earlier version. The curious circumstance is that these fragments are written in "rime royal," while *The Knight's Tale* as we have it is in heroic verse. Did Chaucer keep back his poem from dissatisfaction with the metrical effect, or because it was a mere translation of the *Teseide*, and after 1385 take the trouble of completely rewriting it? or had he discarded the stanza-form at an early period and already recast the poem in heroic rhyme? and was this with the intention of inserting it in a collection of metrical tales

TROILUS AND CRISEYDE ✦ LIBER SECUNDUS.

Incipit prohemium Secundi Libri.

O WHAT these blake wawes for to
sayle,
O wind, O wind, the weder ginneth clere;
For in this see the boot hath swich travayle,
Of my conning that unnethe I it stere:
This see clepe I the tempestous matere
Of desespeyr that Troilus was inne:
But now of hope the calendes biginne.

O lady myn, that called art Cleo,
Thou be my speed fro this forth, & my muse,
To ryme wel this book, til I have do;
Me nedeth here noon other art to use.
Forwhy to every lovere I me excuse,
That of no sentement I this endyte,
But out of Latin in my tonge it wryte.

Wherfore I nil have neither thank ne blame
Of al this werk, but pray yow mekely,
Disblameth me, if any word be lame,
For as myn auctor seyde, so seye I.
Eek though I speke of love unfelingly,
No wonder is, for it nothing of newe is;
A blind man can nat juggen wel in hewis.

Ye knowe eek, that in forme of speche is chaunge
Withinne a thousand yeer, and wordes tho
That hadden prys, now wonder nyce and straunge
Us thinketh hem; and yet they spake hem so,
And spedde as wel in love as men now do;

Page from the Kelmscott edition of "Troylus and Cryseide"

which he had planned already? The question can hardly be decided; but upon the whole we are inclined to think that Chaucer wrote *Palamon and Arcite* in "rime royal" some time between his two Italian visits, and recast it between 1381 and 1385; if we could believe that the plan of *The Canterbury Tales* was formed before 1385 the circumstance would be of the highest interest. It appears certain that the *Second Nun's Tale* (St. Cecilia), *The Clerk's Tale* (Griselda), and *The Man of Law's Tale* (Custance), were written before the framework of the Canterbury pilgrimage was devised. All these are in stanzas, and it would be very natural that *Palamon and Arcite* should follow in the same metre, and be recast upon Chaucer's discovering that heroic rhyme was more suitable to the subject. In this case we might place the design of a series of narrative poems to be fitted into some framework, whether that of a pilgrimage or not, between 1381, when *The Parliament of Fowls* was certainly composed, and 1385, the equally certain date of *The Legend of Good Women*. In the latter poem we see the heroic couplet established as Chaucer's favourite metre, and the clear emergence from his Anglo-Italian into his thoroughly English manner.

Troylus and Cryseide, the flower of the Anglo-Italian period, apparently comes between two poems of importance, both in the seven-line stanza, whose dates are indicated by internal evidence. The former, *The Complaint of Mars*, written at the prompting of John of Gaunt, is probably an allegory, partly mythological, partly astronomical, of certain transactions of a scandalous character which amused the court in 1379. The latter, *The Parliament of Fowls*, is an allegory on the marriage of Richard II. to Anne of Bohemia, which was solemnised early in 1382. Another work of the same period deserves much attention both as a landmark of English prose and an indication of the disposition to serious study and reflection which prevailed more and more with Chaucer as he advanced in years. This is his translation of Boethius, an author memorable in English literature for the illustrious rank of his translators—King Alfred, Chaucer, and Queen Elizabeth. Chaucer here labours purely as a moralist and philosopher. It was not the interspersed lyrics which attracted him, since he renders these in prose. The diligence of Professor Skeat has retrieved the very manuscript he worked upon, which is accompanied by a gloss which has had considerable influence upon his translation.

We have seen that *The House of Fame* was probably begun before the metrical tales. There seems internal evidence of its having been laid aside and resumed, the poet making a new invocation at the commencement of the unfinished third part. This was probably written in 1383 and 1384, but never completed. Tired with the subject, or feeling the loose ("lewd," he calls it) metre an insuperable obstacle to the perfection he coveted, Chaucer in 1385 forsook his poem for *The Legend of Good Women*. A good reason for this undertaking may be found in his desire to recommend himself to Queen Anne; according, indeed, to Lydgate's statement, it was embarked upon at her request. It was intended to have consisted of nineteen stories, only nine of which were

written. The most probable cause of its discontinuance is the heavy misfortune which befell Chaucer at the end of 1386, when the loss of his employment would entail his banishment from court, and the interruption of his relations with the King and Queen, little as they had been personally concerned in his downfall. It may also well be that he was already tiring of his task, and he may have felt misgivings of his power to represent Queen Anne in the character of Alcestis, which appears to have been his intention. Chaucer does not seem to have been one of those poets who, like Spenser and Milton, can undertake great poems with a full assurance of unabated inspiration, life and health vouchsafed, sufficient to carry them to the end. Of all his more important works, *Troylus and Cryseide* is the only one completed, and here he had much aid from Boccaccio.

If Chaucer was somewhat deficient in perseverance, he gave proof of great elasticity of spirit when, shortly after his dismission from office and the relinquishment of *The Legend of Good Women*, he began to execute the framework of his *Canterbury Tales*. The researches of Professor Skeat leave little doubt that the year in which the pilgrimage is supposed to take place is 1387. It does not necessarily follow that the immortal Prologue was written in that year, but Professor Hales has shown, from an allusion to Middelburg as the seat of wool stapling, that it cannot be later than 1388. Several of the tales, as we have seen, probably existed as independent compositions, but even in that case enough remained to be done to render the years following Chaucer's disgrace the most memorable of his life. How long they occupied him it is impossible to say, but the original plan was not fully carried out, and may have been interrupted by the trials consequent upon the loss of his office, as clerk of the works to the royal palaces, in 1391. His pecuniary situation, as we have seen, was then a very trying one, and his was not an age in which an author could write himself out of debt like Sir Walter Scott. He must, moreover, have turned aside for a time from his poetical labour to write the learned treatise on the *Astrolabe* (also unfinished) addressed to his son in 1391; or, as we are rather disposed to think, in 1393, as he mentions the incidence of March 13 on a Saturday, which agrees with that year.

Date of the "Canterbury Tales"

Before passing to a more particular analysis of Chaucer's principal poems, it will be desirable to say something respecting the peculiarities of his language. His dialect is in general the South-east Midland, now become the established speech of educated England. His diction has a copious infusion of words derived from the French, absolutely essential to the poet who would represent the life of courts and camps, and indeed to any poet who would bestow freedom and elasticity upon his metre. The true Saxon speech of his day was not only too scanty for the vocabulary of a poet taking so wide a range as Chaucer, but was too monosyllabic for flexible and sonorous poetry. Chaucer, unlike Spenser, shows moderation and good taste in his verbal mintage, and his Gallic is not more obsolete than his Saxon diction. In truth, he is far less formidable than he seems at first. His obscurities are easily remedied by a glossary, though, while the student of Middle English might protest, the reader for poetical

Chaucer's language and metre

pleasure would be helped by an edition which, without absolutely modernising him, should offer a compromise between the orthography of the fourteenth century and that of our day. His metre presents little difficulty to the reader

Plan of Canterbury in the Fifteenth Century

From a MS. in the British Museum

who remembers the capital rule that an *e* final or preceding a final consonant is almost invariably sounded as a distinct syllable, unless elided before another vowel. Thus, *sharpe speres stronge*, which make only three syllables in modern English, are six in Chaucer. Other needful rules are compendiously given in Professor Skeat's preface to the Oxford Chaucer. Of Chaucer's poetical forms we have already spoken, his great and undying services in this department

are to have been the virtual creator for Britain of the "rime royal" and the decasyllabic heroic couplet.

The "Canterbury Tales"

In treating of Chaucer as a poet it is natural to begin with the work by which

The Narrators of the Tale.

The Procession to the Garden.

From the "Decamerone," 1492.

he chiefly lives in men's memories. This is beyond question *The Canterbury Tales*, not that any immense gap yawns between it and some of the rest as regards poetical merit; but because the merit of the larger and more characteristic part is of a kind which he has not displayed elsewhere. In it and it only he

has no competitors; here he enters a new way, and is as regards his own country entirely original, while at the same time, taking his country as his theme, he becomes her first national poet. This character does not so much apply to the tales themselves, admirable as most of them are, as to the framework in which they are set, the Prologue with the masterly portraits of the personages, and the little bits of conversation and description interspersed between the tales. A certain resemblance to the *Decameron* of Boccaccio is immediately apparent. Each set of tales is put into the mouths of a company brought together by casualty, who employ themselves in telling stories to pass the time. It may even be said that Boccaccio's machinery works more smoothly than Chaucer's. It is easier to imagine tale-telling to a courtly group reclined amid the bowery shades of an Italian garden than to a bevy of pilgrims jogging abreast, as they should have done if every one was to hear, but seem to have neglected to do, since we are told that the Reeve "ever rode the hyndrest of our route." But the comparative awkwardness of the *mise en scène* is amply redeemed by the scope which it affords for the delineation of character. Boccaccio's personages associate by choice, and naturally belong to the same order of society. Chaucer's are actuated by the general instinct of devotion which, combined with conventional prescription and the equally universal love of holiday-making, affects every order of society alike, and each has its representative among them. Boccaccio, consequently, has not discriminated his characters, nor could he have done so unless he had made them the *dramatis personæ* instead of the narrators of his stories. Chaucer, giving to each personage a distinct profession, compelled himself to depict and individualise him, and this proved to be precisely where his best strength lay. Great as were his gifts of humour and pathos, they were less exceptional than his gift of delineation; and what he was among poets his country was among nations. *Excudent alii spirantia mollius aera.* English literature has always been less distinguished by refinement of art than by fidelity to life.

Plan of "The Canterbury Tales"

It must be needless to recite the universally known machinery of *The Canterbury Tales*, the meeting of a party of thirty pilgrims at the Tabard Inn at Southwark, and the arrangement made under the Host's auspices that each shall tell four tales—two on their journey to Canterbury and two on their return. This would have provided no fewer than a hundred and twenty tales, the composition of which, allowing a month for each, would have occupied the poet ten years. In fact, he would appear to have taken nearly five years to have produced the twenty-four which we possess, four of which are unfinished or interrupted. Even from these, three or four should be deducted as probably re-handlings of earlier compositions. These stories, moreover, seem to occupy the entire journey to Canterbury, extending, according to the most probable arrangement, to four days. As the Host, calling on the narrator of the last tale to contribute his quota, says :—

> Lordynges everychoon,
> Now lakketh us no talès more than oon :

Prima. pars.

Here begynneth the Segge of Thebes ful
lamentably to rede By Iohñ lidgate Monke of
Bury aMcyynge it to ye tallys of Cauterbury

So quod I. sith of youre Emprise
I entende aM to youre Coupeyne
And adnyted. a tale for to tele
By hym that hath power to compele
I meue oure hoste gouernere and gyde
Of youre estreone. rydeuge here by syde
Thogh my wit bareyne be and dulle
I wolle rehersse. a story wonderfulle
Touchenge the segge. and destruccyon
Of worthy Thebes. the myghty royalle Toy
Wyle and bytonne. of olde aMcyquite
Vpon the tyme. of worthy eposue
By diligence. of hyuge Amphion
Theeff cause first. of this foundacyon

Canterbury Pilgrims.

[*From MS.* 18 *D. ii. in British Museum.*]

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Fulfilled is my sentènce and my decree.
I trow that we hav herd of ech degree.
Almost fulfild is al my ordinaunce :—

it may be assumed that the demand for two tales apiece had been dropped by the way, and that Chaucer intended to have written and inserted the remainder necessary to make up the thirty. Whether he adhered to his intention of writing thirty more for the return journey may be doubted, for the last tale told, the Parson's, is not a tale at all, but a prose sermon. If dramatic propriety was to continue to be observed, some of the remaining stories must have been of the class "that sownen into synne," for which Chaucer professes

The "Tabard" Inn, Southwark

From "The Gentleman's Magazine," 1812

his repentance in the epilogue ; if indeed this appendage be genuine, which is gravely to be doubted. It is most difficult to believe that he would have renounced and condemned the great bulk of his poetry. A still stronger argument is that among the tales meriting disapprobation on the grounds alleged would be The Wife of Bath's, which nevertheless we find Chaucer recommending to a friend in a poem known to have been written in 1396, or five years after the probable cessation of the Tales :—

The Wyf of Bathe I pray you that ye rede.
L'Envoy de Chaucer a Bukton.

In fact, notwithstanding the contrary opinion of so excellent a critic as Mr. Pollard, we cannot help suspecting that *The Parson's Tale* itself is largely interpolated. To say nothing of its inconsistency with Chaucer's reputed inclination towards the opinions of Wycliffe, it is unlikely that so artistic a

writer would have allowed the priest to pronounce so prolix a discourse after the Host's distinct warning that the set of sun would speedily cut him short, even though it seems just possible that the feat might have been accomplished without the Parson proving himself a second Joshua! It is even more improbable that Chaucer would have inveighed so vehemently against the fashionable apparel of the classes with which he himself mainly consorted, and upon whose good opinion he was so largely dependent. However this may be, there seems ground for the supposition that he desisted from his work under the influence of depressed spirits, whether caused by intellectual strain or by his deprivation of office. The loss is great indeed, and the more so as his plan might well have included a parenthetical description of the pilgrims' spiritual and secular doings at Canterbury, invaluable as a picture of the manners of the age.

¶ The tale of the chanons yeman

¶ And here begynneth the tale

With this chanon I dwelyde ful yere
And of his science am I neuer the nere
Al that I had I haue lost therby
And god woot so haue mo than I
Here as I was wont to be right fresshe & gay
Of clothynge and of other thynges ay
Now may I were an hose by on myn hede
And where my colour was both fresshe & rede
Now it is wan and of a leden hewe
Who so it vseth sore shal it rewe
And of my swynk ȝ blent is myn eye
To such auauntage it is to multeplye
That spedyng science hath made me so bare
That I haue no good where that euer I fare
And yet I am endetted so sore therby,
Of gold that I borowed truely

From the second edition of Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales" printed by Caxton

It is indeed as a painter of manners, and still more as the source from which portraiture of manners in English literature mainly derives, that Chaucer takes rank among the chiefest figures in this literature. As a poet he is indeed great, but when we compare that portion of his work which reveals him merely as the poet with *The Canterbury Tales*, which have in addition so many of the excellences of prose, we perceive that he would not be so great a poet if he were not a poet and something more. His two special claims to renown are to have given such a panorama of English society as, had the undeveloped condition of the language allowed, might equally well have been presented in prose, and to have in so doing marked an epoch. Comparing *The Canterbury Tales* with the rest of his work, we must recognise its infinitely greater

significance. *Troylus and Cryseide* is indeed epoch-making in a sense, but in a purely literary sense. With it the Italian element enters English poetry, to its signal improvement and refinement. But with *The Canterbury Tales* the English people enter, and poetry becomes truly national. No one but Chaucer had yet appeared capable of embodying the national sentiment in true poetry. Langland, indeed, may have had the capacity, but his genius had not been vivified by French and Italian sunshine, and his adherence to the uncouth metrical forms of the past disabled him from expressing the spirit of the new age. Many of the writers of the metrical romances were excellent poets, with a good perception of melody, and would easily have adapted themselves to improvements in metre. But they had no popular sympathies, their condescension would hardly have extended so far as Chaucer's Franklin even,

Pilgrims setting out from the "Tabard"

From Urry's "Chaucer"

knight of the shire though he was. Chaucer fully realises his superiority to both these schools, and makes no secret of it. He ridicules the alliterative versification when he makes his Parson say :—

I cannot geeste *rum, ram, ruf* by letter :—

that is, "I cannot write *gestes* in alliterative metre." It is true that he adds

Ne God wootte, rym holde I but litel bettre ;

but this is one of the hits in which Chaucer indulges at the expense of his characters, as when he drily remarks that the amphibious shipman "rode as he *couthe*," or that the really busy lawyer seemed busier than he was. The Parson, a Monsieur Jourdain reversed, is talking rhyme without knowing it. On the other hand, the faults of the metrical romance, especially its affectation and its intolerable word-spinning, are amusingly parodied in the *Rime of Sir Thopas*, and the unkindest cut of all is the abrupt interruption of the Host, warning the minstrel that his style is now superannuated.

Chaucer as a painter of social types

Chaucer was indeed writing in the dawning of a new age, a crepuscular period which may perhaps be not inaccurately synchronised with the period of the Great Schism from 1378 to 1417, when the ideas of the Renaissance came fairly above the horizon. Though not precisely a humanist, Chaucer had done much to prepare the way for humanism, but he is not so much the apostle of any ideal tendency as the faithful delineator of the actual world. Collecting representatives of all classes of society, he shows us what the people in whose persons the transition from the mediæval to the modern was effected actually were. The highest and the lowest classes are exempt from his observation, neither barons nor beggars could well associate with their fellow-men on a pilgrimage to Canterbury: but he includes all he can, from the Knight to the Cook. In the Knight, one of Chaucer's most beautiful portraits, we see the military character at its best, chivalry purged from all alloy of the foppish and fantastic by a long course of actual warfare, represented with admirable tact as not performed against Christian nations, but against the enemies of the faith in all lands. The probability of the picture is enhanced if we remember that in 1390, about two years after the composition of Chaucer's Prologue, the son of his patron, John o' Gaunt, the future Henry IV., departed on a crusade to "Pruce," and might almost say

From the fourteenth-century Ellesmere MS.

In Lettowe had he reysed[1] and in Ruce.

Some of Chaucer's characters

The good Knight, the first literary representative of one of the most persistent of English types, worthily incarnated in our own time in Colonel Newcome, is finely contrasted with the type of the burgess impersonated in the Host, the leader and controller of the party. Although all treat the Knight with the utmost respect, the years which have mellowed his character have impaired his vigour, and his dignity would evidently suffer if he were brought into close contact with some of the rougher characters among the party. The Host, jolly and free of tongue, but endowed with a mother-wit that supplies the place of breeding, and sufficiently diplomatic to suit his talk to his company, fills the post of factotum to admiration.

[1] Travelled.

A seemly man oure Hooste was with-alle
For to have ben a marchal in an halle,
A large man he was, with eyen stepe,[1]
A fairer burgeys is ther noon in Chepe;
Boold of his speche, and wys and well-y-taught,
And of manhod hym lakkede right naught.
Eek therto he was right a merie man,
And after soper pleyen he bigan,
And spak of myrthe amonges othere thynges,
Whan that we hadde maad our rekenynges.

Even the Host could not give a free rein to joviality until he had got his money.

The social gap between the Knight and the Host is bridged by the Franklin, a man of worship without any of the nobler qualities of the Knight, and several degrees lower in standing; yet, like the Host, one to keep the wheels of social life turning, whilst the Knight is mainly a looker on :—

Withoute baké mete was never his hous,
Of fisshe and flesshe and that so plenteous
It snewèd in his hous of mete and drynke.
Of alle deyntees that men koude thynke.
After the sondry sesons of the yeer,
So changed he his mete and his soper.

Yet this devotee of good living, "Epicurus owene sone," so far deviates from the precepts of his master as to be forward in charging himself with public duties :—

At sessions ther was he lord and sire;
Ful ofté tyme he was knyght of the shire,
A sherrive had he bene, and a countour;
Was no wher such a worthy vavasour.[2]

A highly interesting passage, showing how the traditions of English public life in the counties remain unbroken to this day. It is observable that the Franklin rides next to the Sergeant-at-Law, probably as one of the great unpaid in quest of legal guidance.

As the Franklin is a foil to the Knight, so is the Miller a foil to the Host. The Host can adapt himself to circumstances. He can hold his own with any one in rough language, but when he has to ask the Prioress for a tale

He sayde
As curteisly as it had been a mayde.

But the Miller is a piece of low nature at first hand, a rude block without a single polished corner. Chaucer's description of him is one of the most graphic of his pictures :—

The Miller was a stout carle for the nones,
Ful byg he was of braun and eke of bones;
That proved wel, for o'er al ther he cam,
At wrastlynge he would have away the ram.

[1] Bright. [2] Landholder.

He was short-sholdered, broode, a thikke knarre,
There nas no dore that he nold heve of barre,
Or breke it at a rennynge with his heed.
His berd as any sowe or foxe was reed.
And therto brood, as thugh it were a spade,
Upon the cope[1] right of his nose he hade
A werte, and theren stood a tofte of herys,
Reed as the brustles of a sowys erys,
His nosé-thirlés[2] blaké were and wyde ;
A swerd and bokeler bare he by his syde ;
His mouthe as wide was as a grete forneys,
He was a janglere and a goliardeys,[3]
And that was most of sinne and harlotries.
Well koud he stelen corn and tollen thries,
And yet he had a thombe of gold, pardee.
A whit cote and a blew hood weréd he.
A bagge pipe wel koud he blowe and sowne,
And therwithal he broghte us out of towne.

This sturdy churl relates a tale entirely in keeping with his own character for coarseness and humour, for dramatic propriety must be considered above all things. The apology which Chaucer deems it necessary to prefix is important, showing that among "gentil wights" there were even at that period bounds to our ancestors' toleration in these matters. Is he not a reporter? Would it be allowable to

Falsen som of my mateere?
And therfore, who-so list it nat i-here,
Turne o'er the leefe and chose another tale ;
For he shal find enowe, both grete and smale,
Of storial thing that toucheth gentillesse,
And eke moralitye, and hoolinesse.
Blameth nat me if that ye chese amys,
The Millere is a cherl, ye knowe wel this.

Chaucer's humour and morality

Most humorous is the ingenuity with which Chaucer thus shifts the blame of encouraging the Miller's ribaldry from himself to his readers, and had any one excepted that the remedy he deems so simple was impracticable to the Miller's hearers, he would probably have laid the blame upon the Host. What the more decorous members of his reading public may have thought we do not know, but assuredly in later ages neither lord nor lady has wished the Miller's tale and similar compositions away. Their value augments by efflux of time, for they become more and more precious as authentic testimonies to manners receding into obscurity. But they are not the staple of the collection. *The Canterbury Tales* may be compared to a mingled gallery of Italian and Dutch pictures. The latter are entrusted to the pilgrims of the lower class, such as the Miller, the Reeve, the Friar, the Summoner ; the others to the folk of condition, such as the Knight, the Squire, the Franklin, the Man of Law, the Physician, the Clerk of Oxford ; while the Merchant, the Shipman, the Wife of Bath and the Nun's Priest may be regarded as intermediate. There is one

[1] Top. [2] Nostrils [3] Ribald.

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apparent exception in the worthless Pardoner, who tells one of the most moral, striking and tragical tales in the collection. But this is purely in the way of business, and when he has finished narrating and moralising, Chaucer makes him turn himself inside out with a neatness which affords one of the best specimens of his comic manner :—

> But, sirs, a word forgat I in my tale ;
> I have relikes and pardons in my male[1]
> As faire as any man in Engeland,
> Which were me yeven by the popes hand
> If any of you wole of devocioun
> Offren, and han myn absolutioun,
> Com forth anon, and kneleth here adown,
> And mekely receyveth my pardoun ;
> Or elles taken pardon as ye wende,
> Al newe and fresh at every milès ende—
> So that ye offren alwey newe and newe
> Nobles or pens, whiche that be goode and trewe.
> It is an honour to everech that is heer
> That ye mowe have a suffisant Pardoneer
> Tassoillé you in contree as ye ryde
> For áventúres whiche that may betyde,
> Paraventure ther may fallen one or two
> Down of his hors and breke his nekke atwo ;
> Looke which a seuretee is it to you alle,
> That I am in your felawship y-falle,
> That may assoile you, both more and lasse
> Whann that the soul shal fro the body passe.
> I rede that our Host here shal bigynne,
> For he is most envoluped in sinne.

Specimens of Chaucer's more elevated mood will be more conveniently selected from his other works, which might otherwise fail to receive due notice. *The Knight's Tale* (Palamon and Arcite) is, however, the highest flight he ever took, and *The Squire's Tale* (Cambuscan), *The Man of Lawe's Tale* (Custaunce), and *The Clerk of Oxenford's Tale* (Griselda), are greatly superior to any romantic fiction that England had seen before him. Some inferior stories may be old work employed to eke out deficient material. If the two compositions in prose, *Melibœus* (a translation from Albertano of Brescia) and *The Parson's Tale*, were introduced for this reason, Chaucer's need of "copy" must have been very sore. There can be no doubt that he intended them to form a part of the collection, though the uncertainty as to the exact order of the tales, which continues after Bradshaw's best efforts, seems to prove that this collection was not published by himself. The various sources of the Tales are fully investigated in Professor Skeat's edition of Chaucer's works.

Inferences respecting the state of contemporary society

The frankness and good fellowship with which all the pilgrims meet at the Tabard, and, save for some wrangles, mostly growing out of hereditary trade grudges, maintain throughout their journey, convey a pleasing idea of the

[1] Wallet.

prevalent simplicity of manners and kindly feeling between classes. At the same time it is clear that, from no fault of their own, the classes are drifting more widely apart, and that increasing wealth and culture, all tending one way, must eventually provoke a scission. Even now, each, as a rule, rides and talks with the man nearest him in social standing. One feature is surprising—the general air of comfort and content. King Edward's conquests have been entirely lost, but nobody thinks of them. Only six or seven years before the country had been agitated by a tumultuous revolt against excessive taxation, accompanied by a fiery outburst of socialistic doctrines, which had been quenched in blood after costing the lives of many nobles. The only vestige of this is a ludicrous comparison in the tale of Chanticleer between the noise of Straw's rabble rout and that of the farm people pursuing the fox:—

From the fourteenth-century Ellesmere MS.

> Certes he, Jakké Straw and his meynee,
> Ne made never shoutés half so shrille
> When that they wolden any Flemynge kille.

Are we to suppose that Chaucer, a courtly poet, deliberately excluded the suffering of the villeins from his consideration? The Reeve (steward) is plainly taxed with wronging his master, but nothing is said of his oppressing the poor. One kind of oppression, indeed, is powerfully satirised, but one which affected all classes except the very highest—that wrought by the rapacity of ecclesiastical officers. This clearly was an insufferable grievance, and, taken in connection with Chaucer's onslaught on the knavery of mendicant friars and pardoners, and the idleness and luxury of monks, suggests the inquiry whether Chaucer had any sympathy with the Wycliffe movement then surging around him, or any prevision of its consequences. Probably his position towards Wycliffe was nearly that of Erasmus towards Luther. He seems to convey some hint of sympathy when the Parson, reproving the Host for profanity, is called a Lollard for his pains, as in the eighteenth century he would have been called a Methodist. Ecclesiastical extortions, however, though exciting Chaucer's ire, do not occupy much of his attention, any more than foreign wars, those against the infidel excepted, or the contentions of nobles and parliaments at home. It would be difficult to make out from *The Canterbury Tales* under what form of government Englishmen were then living. The general view which they give of English family life at the time is not unfavourable, if we bear in mind how large a share of the satirist's stock-in-trade has

always been contributed by the real or imaginary imperfections of the female sex. The standard of education appears higher than might have been expected, even the talk of the unlettered implies a considerable amount of general information, and the Scriptures are freely quoted in the vernacular. Agencies were clearly at work which in some measure anticipated the office of the printing-press: even the preachings of itinerating cheats like the Friar and the Pardoner must have helped to preserve the common man's mind from utter stagnation. Among these agencies must be enumerated travel, which seems

The Reeve

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to have been more frequent and more extensive than could have been expected. We are prepared to hear of the Knight having fought the unbeliever wherever he could find him, and of the Shipman knowing every haven "from Gootland to Finistere": but it is surprising to learn that the Wife of Bath has been three times at Jerusalem, to say nothing of Rome, Bologna, Compostella, and Cologne.

"Troylus and Cryseide"

Among Chaucer's other works the one with the first claim upon our attention is the *Troylus and Cryseide*, for this, too, in a manner may be termed epoch-making. It is the first example in our language of heroic narrative, as distinguished from the lyrical narrative of the metrical romances. It affords the first instance of a well-ordered plot, distinguishable from a mere series of

adventures. It is the first poem that is psychologically interesting, exhibiting the development of character under the stress of circumstance. Historically it marks the introduction into English poetry of that Italian influence by which it was to be so greatly transformed and enriched. Chaucer's obligations to Italy are indeed extensive : a third of his poem is a translation from the *Filostrato* of Boccaccio. Yet he amply vindicates his originality by his enrichment of his original, and in particular he has anticipated the genius of Italian poetry itself by his creation of Pandarus. Pandarus is precisely the

The Cook of London

MS. Gg. 4. 27, *University Library, Cambridge*

semi-serious, semi-comic character in which Italian poetry delights, and in which at a later date Italian poets excelled, but here Chaucer owes little to Boccaccio. Pandarus, the lovers' disinterested friend, who accepts an equivocal part out of sheer compassion and amiability, and by no means the "broker-lackey" of *Troilus and Cressida*, is an invention of Chaucer's own. He has further greatly improved upon his original by the elevation which he has given to the character of Troilus, and exhibits great skill in depicting the various stages of Cressida's yielding, first to Troilus and afterwards to Diomede. He evidently does not wish his heroine to forfeit our sympathies, nor does she. In the first part of her history she would command modern sympathies

as fully as Juliet, could any such valid plea as the hereditary enmity of Montague and Capulet be adduced, but the chivalric code of morals made this unnecessary for Chaucer's contemporaries. In the later passages of her career, while forfeiting respect, she obtains compassion, and might have had something more if Chaucer had taken more pains with the character of the triumphant Diomede. Perhaps he feared to steal away his reader's, like Cressida's, heart from Troilus, a most fascinating hero. Nevertheless, as in *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer is here essentially the comic poet. He avoids the deeper

The Pardoner

MS. Gg 4 27, University Library, Cambridge

aspects of the situation, regrets the inevitably tragic ending of his tale, and trusts to indemnify himself by writing something more cheerful :—

> Go, litel book! Go, litel myn tragedie!
> Then God thy maker yit, or that he dye,
> So send might to make in som comedie!

He might have thought himself indemnified by his creation of Pandarus, the good-natured sceptical man-of-the world, who feels himself in his experience so superior to the callow lovers, but who also seems to himself wiser than he really is. The scene where, approaching Cressida on his mission, he finds her reading the romance of Thebes, with apologies for not being occupied with the lives of the Saints, is, in M. Jusserand's words, "a true comedy scene, the

dialogue so rapid and sharp that one might think this part written for a play." Chaucer would have been a great dramatist if he had lived in the time of Shakespeare. His poem is well characterised by Mr. Rossetti as at once "the very topmost blossom and crown of the chivalric passion and gallantry, and the exquisite firstfruits of that humorous study of character in which our national writers have so specially excelled."

Troylus and Cryseide is not a poem from which quotation is easy. It has few "purple patches." The poet rarely sinks below himself, but neither does

The Wife of Bath

MS. Gg. 4. 27, University Library, Cambridge

he ascend very much beyond the general level of easy adequacy to his theme. This very adequacy renders his most characteristic passages, as they ought to be, discursive, and ill adapted for quotation. The following is a good example of his power in the expression of deep feeling. Troilus is lamenting the departure of Cressida to the Greek camp :—

> Who seeth you now, my righté lodé sterre
> Who sit right now or stant in your presénce
> Who can comfórten now your hertés werre
> Now I am gon, whom yeve ye audience ?
> Who speketh for me right now in mye absénce

Allas, no wight : and that is al my care ;
For wel I wot, as yvele as I ye fare.

How sholde I thus ten dayés ful endure,
Whan I the firsté might have al this tene?
How shal she don ek, sorwful créature?
For tendrenesse how shal she ek sustene
Swich wo for me? O pitous, pale and greene
Shal ben your freshe, womanliché face
For longing, or ye torne into this place.

The Monk

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And whan he fel in any slomberinges,
Anon biginne he sholde for to grone,
And dremen of the dredfullesté thinges
That mighte ben ; as, mete [1] he were allone
In place horriblé making ay his mone,
Or meten that he was amongés alle
His enemies and in hir hondés falle.

And therwithal his body sholdé sterte,
And with the stert al sodeinly awake,
And swich a tremour fele aboute his herte,
That of the fere his body sholdé quake ;
And therwithal he sholde a noisé make,
And seme as though he sholde fallé depe
From height on-lofte, and then he wolde wepe

[1] Imagine.

And rewen on himself so pitously,
That wonder was to here his fantasye
Another time he sholdé mightily
Comforte himself, and seyn it was folýe
So causeless swich drede for to drye ;[1]
And aft begin his aspré[2] peynés newe,
That every man might on his sorwes rewe.

It will be immediately apparent how much under Chaucer English literature has gained in sustained facility of expression, sweetness of versification, and the

The Manciple

MS. Gg. 4. 27, University Library, Cambridge

command of appropriate language. Some of these lines seem a prefiguration of Spenser.

Before Chaucer had quite reached the end of his poem it occurred to him that his delineation of female inconstancy might offend the ladies :—

Beseching every lady bright of hewe,
And every gentil woman, what she be,
That, al be that Criseyde was untrewe,
That for that gilt ye be not wroth with me.

[1] Endure. [2] Sharp.

Ye may her gilt in other bokés see.
And gladlier I wol writé, yif you leste
Penelopéé's trouthe and good Alceste.

He partially realised this aspiration in *The Legend of Good Women*, memorable, unless *The Knight's Tale* had preceded it, as the first written in heroic metre. The Prologue, one of his best compositions, and extant in two different versions, is a further deprecation of the offence given by the unfavourable

"Legend of Good Women

Envy (on his wolf gnawing a bone) **Charity (with her winged and flaming heart)**

"Parson's Tale"

MS. Gg. 4 27, University Library, Cambridge

view taken of feminine constancy in *Troylus and Cryseide* and his translation of the *Roman de la Rose*. The poet feigns that, desirous of seeing the daisy's first opening to the star of day, he passes the night in a garden to be on the spot. While sleeping there he has a vision of angry Love :—

Whan I was leydé, and hadde myn eyen hed
I fel on slepe, in-with an hour or two.
Me metté[1] how I lay in the medowe tho,

[1] Dreamed

To seen this flour that I love so and drede ;[1]
And from afer come walking in the mede
The god of Love, and in his hand a quene,
And she was clad in real[2] habite grene ;
A fret of golde she hadde next her heer,
And upon that a white crowne she beer,
With flourouns smalé, and I shal nat lye,
For al the worlde right as a däysye
Y-corouned is with white leves lyte,
So were the flourouns of her coroun white ;
For of a perlé, fine, oriental,
Hire whité coronne was y-maked al,
For which the white coroune above the grene
Made her like a daysie for to sene,
Considered eke her fret of gold above.
Y-clothéd was this mighty god of Love
In silke enbrouded, ful of grene greves,[3]
In-with a fret of redé rosé leves,
The freshest syn the worlde was first bygonne,
His gilté here was corouned with a sonne,
In stede of golde, for hevynesse and wyghte ;
Therwith me thoght his facé shon so brighte
That wel unnethés[4] myght I him beholde,
And in his hande me thoght I saw him holde
Two firy dartés, as the gledes[5] rede,
And angelyke his winges I saw sprede.
And, al be that men seyn blinde is he,
Algate me thoghte that he mighte se ;
For sternély on me he gan by holde,
So that his looking doth my herte colde.

Love rates the poet, and accuses him of

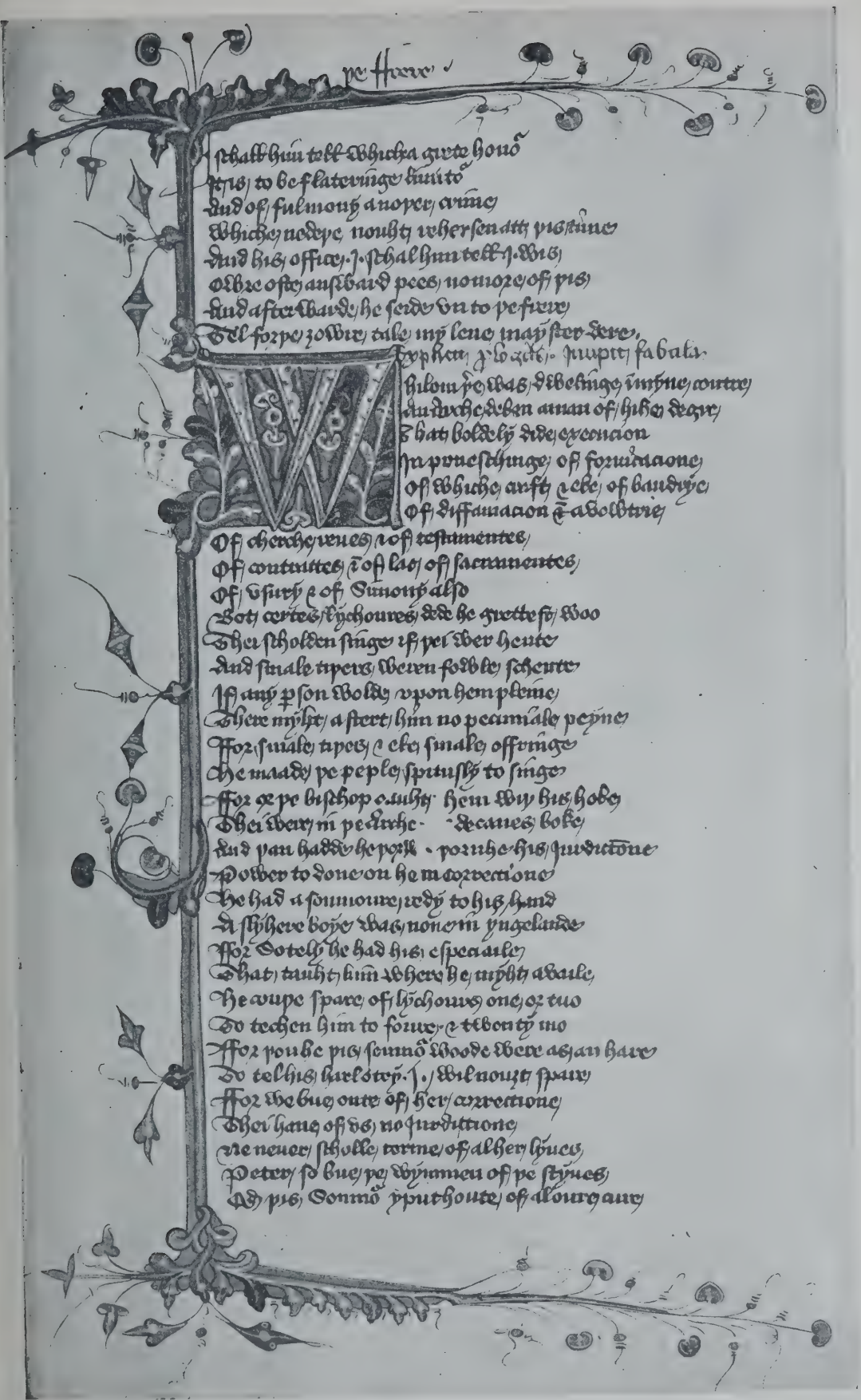
Letting folke from here devocioun
To servé me, and holdest it folye
To servé Love. Thou maist it nat denye,
For in pleyne text, withouten need of glose,
Thou hast translate the Romaunce of the Rose,
That is an heresye ayeins my lawe,
And makest wisé folke from me withdrawe ;
And of Cresyde thou hast seyde as thee lyste,
That maketh men to wommen lasse[6] tryste.[7]

The beautiful lady intercedes, and he is let off on condition of performing a penance, thus described :—

Thou shalt while that thou livest yere by yere
The mosté partyé of thy tyme spende
In makyng of a glorious legende
Of goodé wymmen, maydenés and wyves,
That weren true in lovyng al hire lyves ;

[1] L'esca fu 'l seme chi egli sparge e miete,
Dolce et acerbo, chi i' pavento e bramo.
Petrarch, Sonnet cxxix.

[2] Royal. [3] Boughs. [4] Hardly. [5] Live coals. [6] Less. [7] Trust.



Chaucer. "Canterbury Tales."

[*Lansdowne MS.* 851, *British Museum.*]

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And tell of falsé men that hem bytraien,
That al here lyf ne don nat but asayen
How many women they may doon a shame,
For in youre worlde that now is holde a game.
And thogh thee like nat a lovere bee,
Speke wel of love ; this penance yive I thee.

Chaucer accordingly proceeds to indite the history of Cleopatra, and follows it up with those of Thisbe, Dido, Medea, Lucretia, Ariadne, Philomena, Phyllis, and Hypermnestra. But here he stopped, leaving the ten more he had planned unattempted, even though the last of them, Alcestis, was to have idealised Queen Anne herself. He should have begun with it, for as

Gluttony

Abstinence

"Parson's Tale"

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Mr. Pollard remarks, it was scarcely possible that he should not tire of monotonous panegyric. The subject, moreover, if, as affirmed by Lydgate, Queen Anne herself suggested it to him, was not of his own devising, and it is but seldom that a poet can entertain a suggestion from the outside with the cordiality which Milton manifested towards Ellwood's. The tales, nevertheless, contain many admirable passages. As might be expected, the first of the series, Cleopatra, Thisbe, Dido, are the best.

The following passage from Cleopatra is highly spirited, though Chaucer's Cleopatra is not the Cleopatra of Shakespeare or of history :—

She made hir subtil workmen make a shryne
Of al the rubees and the stonés fyne
In al Egypté that she koude espye ;
And putte ful the shryne of spicerye,

And let the corps embawme, and forth she fette
This dedè corps, and in the shryne it shette
And next the shryne a pitte than doth she grave,
And alle the serpentes that she myght have
She put hem in that grave, and thus she seyde :—
"Now, love, to whom my sorweful herte obeyde
So ferforthely that fro that blissful houre
That I you swor to ben al frely youre,
I mene you, Antonius, my Knight,
That never waking in the day or nyght
Ye nere out of myn herte's remembraunce,
For wele or woo, for carole or for daunce ;
And in myself this covenant made I tho,
That ryght swych as ye felter wele or wo,
As ferforth as it in my powere lay,
Unréprovàble unto my wyfnood ay,
The samé wolde I felen, life or deethe ;
And thilke covenaunt, while me lasteth breethe,
I wol fulfille ; and that shal wel be seene,
Was never unto hir love a trewer queene.
And wyth that worde, naked, with ful good herte,
Among the serpents in the pit she sterte ;
And ther she chees to have her buryinge.
Anon the neddres[1] gon her for to stynge,
And she her deeth receveth with good cheere,
For love of Antony that was so deere.

The first English artist in the heroic couplet was assuredly not the worst.

"The House of Fame"

The most celebrated of Chaucer's remaining poems is *The House of Fame*, an allegory founded on Ovid's famous description in the *Metamorphoses*. It suffers from Chaucer's habitual deficiency in constructive skill, except when following a model, and is far from rivalling either this or Pope's subsequent adaptation, *The Temple of Fame*, in strictly poetical merit, but this was hardly Chaucer's aim. He designs to amuse, and while the early part is somewhat tedious, the painting of Fame's hall is bright and lively ; and there is much humour in her treatment of her votaries, to whom, according to their deserts, she assigns the golden trumpet, the black trumpet, or no trumpet at all. As already remarked, it was probably begun not long after the poet's return from his mission to Genoa and Florence, laid aside, and taken up again about 1383, but was never completed, though probably little remained to be added. The scheme of the poem betrays an intimate acquaintance with Dante, but it has nothing of the mediæval spirit.

"The Parliament of Fowls."

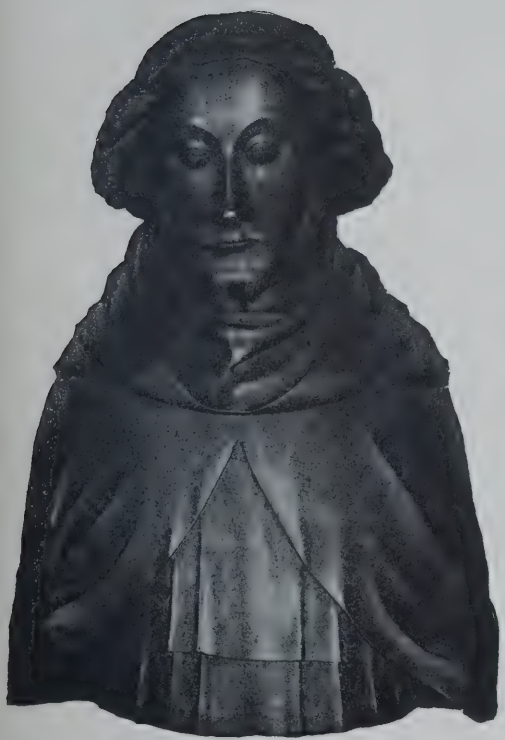
The date of *The Parliament of Fowls* is fixed at 1382 by the subject, the poem being an allegory on the marriage of Richard II. to Anne of Bohemia. The eagle which the eagle princess favours is Richard, while the two tercels which woo her unsuccessfully are the two princes of lower degree to whom she had been previously contracted. The allegory is spirited and graceful, but the most poetical parts of the piece are the induction, borrowed from the *Somnium Scipionis*, and the description of the garden where the fowls meet on

[1] Adders.

Valentine's Day to choose their mates. The invention here frequently brings to mind a celebrated work later by a century, Francesco Colonna's *Polifilo*.

Minor works.

Some poems inferior in merit and importance to the above are still of considerable interest for special reasons. *The Book of the Duchess* is Chaucer's earliest work that has come down to us; it records his attachment to the House of Lancaster, and is remarkable for a bright picture of bonny English



Richard II.

From the gilt effigy in Westminster Abbey

Anne of Bohemia

From the gilt effigy in Westminster Abbey

girlhood. *The Complaint of Mars* is an interesting example of the treatment of contemporary circumstances under a veil of allegory, as we have already seen "shadowing forth" the institution of the Order of the Garter in *The Green Knight*. *The Complaint unto Pity* is eloquent and of moment if it really expresses Chaucer's personal feelings. *Anelyda and Arcite* seems to indicate that Chaucer did at one time propose to tell the story of *Palamon and Arcite* in another metre than the heroic, though it remains uncertain whether the intention was completely carried out. Chaucer's strictly lyrical poems are not numerous. Though a master of tuneful versification, he seems to have

rarely felt the lyrical impulse; he can prolong the flow of music indefinitely, but has no snatches of melody. It does indeed appear that he wrote many *balades*, *virelays*, and the like, which have not come down to us, but these pieces would in general be anything rather than spontaneous gushes of song. The good fortune of Professor Skeat has recently retrieved one, which may follow as an example. The music of the writer's verse and his mastery of his complicated form are admirable, but when we find him comparing his immersion in love to the immersion of a pike in a sauce made of sopped bread and spices, we must suspect that "Rosemounde's" chains were but lightly worn by him :—

BALADE TO ROSEMOUNDE.

Madame, ye ben of al beauté the shryne,
As fer as cercled is the mappé mounde,
For as the crystal glorioùs ye shyne
And lyké ruby ben your chekés rounde.
Ther with ye ben so mery and so jocounde
That a revel whan that I see you daunce,
It is an oynément unto my wounde,
Though ye to me ne do no daliaunce.

Far though I wepe of teres full a tyne,
Yet may that wo myn herté nat confounde ;
Your seemly voys that ye so smal out-twine [1]
Maketh my thoght in joye and blis habounde.
So curteisly I go, with lové bounde,
That to myself I say, in my penaunce,
Suffyseth me to love you, Rosemounde,
Though ye to me ne do no daliaunce.

Nas never pyke walwéd in galantyne
As I in love am walwed and y-wounde ;
For which ful ofté I myself dyvyne
That I am trewe Tristram the secounde ;
My love may not be refreyd [2] nor afounde [3];
I brenne ay in an amorous plesaunce.
Do what you lyst, I wyl your thral be founde,
Though ye to me ne do no daliaunce.

Significance and perennial freshness of Chaucer

Chaucer's significance could not be appreciated by himself or his contemporaries. It might even then be seen how greatly he excelled all preceding poets in command of language and metre, in felicity of subject and treatment, in all things relating to the poetic art. But it is only on looking back from afar that it could be discerned how completely he personified the union of the Norman and the Saxon in the Englishman, or with what authority he ushered in the new period of our language. Nor could contemporaries have foretold that perennial freshness which is perhaps the most extraordinary of his attributes. While many other writers of great name and much nearer to our times

[1] Untwisting all the chains that tie
The hidden soul of harmony.
L'Allegro.

[2] Chilled. [3] Founder.

have become more or less obscure and unsympathetic with the spirit of the age, Chaucer, with the disadvantages of partly obsolete diction and a state of society widely differing from our own, remains almost as fresh as when he wrote, and a permanent source of inspiration to his successors from Spenser and Dryden down to Keats and William Morris. This can only denote great simplicity of character, and a spontaneity of utterance remarkable in one so rarely visited by poetical inspiration in its purest form, the lyrical. The same freshness characterises the other most illustrious literary productions of the age, Froissart's *Chronicles*, Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, and the *Decameron* of

Lechery (with her goat and sparrow) **Chastity (trampling on the dragon of lust)**

"Parson's Tale"

MS. Gg. 4. 27, University Library, Cambridge

Boccaccio, and may be regarded as the accompaniment of the youth of an age of letters.

Suppositious poems

Several poems incorrectly attributed to Chaucer have found their way into the collected editions of his writings, where they ought always to remain as an appendix, although their spuriousness has been satisfactorily demonstrated by Bradshaw, Skeat and Ten Brink. The most important are *The Flower and the Leaf*, so widely known from the brilliant *rifaccimento* of Dryden, *The Court of Love*, *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale*, and *Chaucer's Dream*. It is difficult to determine whether it be more mortifying to be compelled to deprive Chaucer of so beautiful a poem as *The Flower and the Leaf*, or more satisfactory to find that he had so excellent a disciple as the anonymous author at that very dul

period of English literature, the fifteenth century. That this is its date the diction leaves no doubt, and it was probably written late in the century, as the Order of the Garter is spoken of as an ancient institution. Its rules of rhyming, too, are not Chaucer's. It is nevertheless not unworthy of him, and in particular contains one stanza, which, while it continued to be attributed to him, was frequently quoted as an example of his merit as a landscape-painter, and which is, in fact, more strikingly true to nature than most pieces of description in his genuine writings :—

> To a pleasaunt grove I gan to passe,
> Long or the brighte sonne up-risen was,
>
> In which were okes greate, streight as a line,
> Under the which the grasse, so fresh of hewe,
> Was newly sprong ; and an eight foot or nine
> Every tree well fro his fellow grew,
> With branches brode, laden with leves newe,
> That sprongen out ayen the sunne shene
> Some very red, and some a glad light grene.

There is more description than character in the poem, which may be defined as a vision with affinity to a Masque. The writing is throughout very beautiful ; and if inferior in splendour to Dryden's renowned imitation, it has more of the spirit of courtly chivalry. The versification is excellent. It professes to be the work of a lady, but probably merely for reasons of dramatic propriety. Professor Skeat's argument that the assumption of the female character by a man would have seemed ridiculous, if it has any weight at all, cannot apply to an anonymous poem.

It is rather surprising that *The Court of Love* should ever have been attributed to Chaucer. The poem is only found in one manuscript of the early period of the sixteenth century, and there is no reason why this may not be the date of composition.[1] It is an elegant poem, rehearsing a youth's pilgrimage to the Court of Love, and, although differing from Chaucer in diction and metrical rules, clearly the work of one who had read him to good purpose. *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale*, also a very pretty poem, has been ascertained by Professor Skeat to be the composition of a writer named Clanvowe, plausibly identified with Sir Thomas Clanvowe, who died in 1410. *Chaucer's Dream*, a long narrative poem, has considerable poetical merit, but, as Professor Skeat remarks, is more like the romance of *Sir Launfal* than anything of Chaucer's. It does not follow that by representing Chaucer as the subject of the vision, the writer meant to imply that he was the author of the poem.

Aids to the study of Chaucer

The Canterbury Tales was one of the first English books to be printed, Caxton probably putting the first edition in hand as soon as he set up his press in England. The first complete edition of Chaucer's works was

[1] Although *The Court of Love* is certainly not Chaucer's, there is no force in Professor Lounsbury's argument against its authenticity that such names as "Philogenet" could not have been used by a Western writer until after the fall of Constantinople ; Boccaccio has "Filocopo" in the first half of the fourteenth century.

William Thynne's in 1532, but the first really critical edition of any portion was Tyrwhitt's edition of *The Canterbury Tales* in 1775–1778, a masterpiece of learning and acumen. In 1845 Sir Harris Nicolas placed the biography of Chaucer on an authentic basis. In 1866 Henry Bradshaw took up the study of Chaucer with a vigour and acuteness which, if he had not allowed his attention to be diverted to other subjects, would have left little to be performed by others, although the rhyme test, so invaluable in ascertaining the authenticity of the writings attributed to Chaucer, was independently applied by Bernard Ten Brink, whose labours upon Chaucer in all departments are most important. About the same time an immense impetus was given to Chaucerian study by Dr. Furnivall's foundation and energetic direction of the Chaucer Society, whose numerous publications prepared the way for the standard library edition of Professor Skeat, and the one-volume edition by Mr. A. W. Pollard and his coadjutors, the most convenient for general readers. The authenticity of Chaucer's doubtful poems is fully investigated from the philological and metrical points of view in Professor Skeat's *Chaucer Canon* (1900). Professor Lounsbury's three volumes of Chaucerian essays are invaluable aids to the study of almost all questions connected with his writings. For Chaucer's grammar and metre in general, see the treatise by Bernard Ten Brink, recently translated into English, and, for his pronunciation, the works on the subject by Alexander J. Ellis and R. F. Weymouth.

CHAPTER VI

THE SUCCESSORS OF CHAUCER—THE BEGINNINGS OF CULTIVATED PROSE

CHAUCER'S position in our literary history is, in one respect, ambiguous; he does and he does not make an era. No great author is more utterly dissimilar to his predecessors among his own countrymen. His position is perfectly unique in his absolute unindebtedness to any preceding English poet. All his innovations, in so far as they are not suggested by his own genius, are importations from foreign literatures. So far he is, indeed, an epoch-making poet. But, whereas the new era introduced by authors of his significance is in general signalised by crowds of imitators and disciples, silence, broken only by the feeble accents of Lydgate and Hoccleve, gathers around Chaucer. The antiquated styles of poetry which he has superseded die out. We hear little of *rom, ram, ruf* in the fifteenth century, and though chivalric fiction stood at the threshold of a marvellous development in prose, metrical romances of chivalry after the pattern which he parodied in *Sir Thopas* are few and far between. But the new forms of poetry seem as dead as the old, or are cultivated with dismaying inefficiency. One elegant poet, indeed, the anonymous author of *The Flower and the Leaf*, might have continued Chaucer's work on the fanciful and romantic side, and probably would have done so if he had been a professed man of letters. He most likely belonged to the patrician class and wrote merely for amusement. But even he makes no approach to the greater and more truly national qualities of Chaucer, his humour, his perception of character, and his skill in depicting the life around him. Reversing the Apostolic truism, it might almost seem that, having first of Englishmen brought these qualities into the world with him, he had also carried them out. Tennyson, who justly calls him "The morning star of song," admits that two centuries elapsed before his beams awoke the Memnon of English literature:

Decline of English poetry after Chaucer

> Dan Chaucer, our first warbler, whose sweet breath
> Preluded those melodious blasts that fill
> The spacious times of great Elizabeth
> With songs that echo still.

It is far from Richard II. to Elizabeth!

We shall have to examine into the causes which rendered the fifteenth

century so exceedingly barren a period in the literature, not merely of England but of Europe. For the present our attention must be given to the contemporaries and successors who actually formed a circle of which Chaucer might be termed the centre, but not a sphere of which he could be regarded as the nucleus.

The points of dissimilarity between Chaucer and his contemporaries are entirely to his advantage. Compared with the most distinguished rivals of his own day he may be chiefly characterised as more of a national poet.

Chaucer the poet of his nation

Layamon had attempted to write what in his day really passed for the national epic of England, but the substance of his poem was borrowed from the French. The metrical romancists, often genuine poets, were almost invariably translators or adapters. Two considerable poets remain, the anonymous author of *Pearl* and *The Green Knight*, and the author of *Piers Plowman*. It is a remarkable instance of the illusive power of style that Langland should appear to us so much more ancient than Chaucer. They were in fact contemporaries. *Piers Plowman* dates in its first recension from 1362, and Chaucer's first poem must have been composed within the six or seven years following. They depict the society of the same period, and each portrait bears the impress of spirit and truth. Yet, whereas the general effect of historical perspective is to cause persons and things to appear in closer proximity than was really the case, Langland appears as though he preceded Chaucer by a century. The main reasons must be that his poetical form is obsolete, while Chaucer's is as fresh as ever; that its employment constrained him to a cramped and uncouth method of expression, which to us, though unjustly, seems affectation, while Chaucer's verse glides smoothly along; above all, perhaps, that by resorting to Italy, Chaucer had placed himself in connection with the great traditions of classical art, imperfectly as these were then known or understood. There is every reason to believe that Langland might have done as much if he had enjoyed Chaucer's advantages, and that the difference between the two poets is chiefly that between the town mouse and the country mouse—one a courtier at a brilliant court, enjoying the most refined society and the keenest intellectual stimulus his age could afford; the other, though he spent much of his life in London, a provincial, picking up his training as he could, and looking upon the life of courts and cities as an external though highly intelligent observer. It is to the immortal honour of Chaucer that he did not under these circumstances become the mere court poet, but retained that living interest in English life in all its phases which made him its incomparable delineator.

John Gower

The gap between the two poets is partly filled up by a third, who, like Chaucer, combined the scholar with the courtier. The time has been when the name of JOHN GOWER seemed hardly less conspicuous than Chaucer's own in the record of English literature.

The history of Gower is imperfectly known, but this probably arises from the uneventful character of his life. Like Chaucer, he was a scholar and a courtier, but not

a courtier to the same extent, although of better birth and connections. Notwithstanding Caxton's assertion that he was a Welshman (probably founded on some erroneous connection of his name with the peninsula of Gower in Pembrokeshire) and Leland's statement of his relationship to the Yorkshire family of Gower, the identity of armorial bearings leaves little doubt of his having belonged to the family of Sir Robert Gower, of Brabourne, Kent, who died about 1349 possessed of property in Kent and Suffolk, one of whose Suffolk manors was afterwards made over by his daughter and son-in-law to their kinsman, John Gower, whose arms are the same as the poet's and who was in all probability the same person. Gower undoubtedly had property both in Kent and

Miniature Portrait of Gower

British Museum, Egerton MS. 1991

Suffolk, but was almost certainly a native of the former county. The lateness of his appearance as a poet, and his apparent attachment to the City, suggest that he may have been a merchant and made a fortune in business before addicting himself to study. There is no ground for identifying him with an Essex incumbent of the name. He was, in fact, married, and not before but long after the time at which he could have taken holy orders. The marriage took place in 1397, when Gower was living, as he continued to do until his death, in the priory of St. Mary Overies, Southwark. Three years afterwards he speaks of himself as old and blind, and it seems a reasonable inference that both the marriage and the residence were connected with the state of his health. He died in 1408, bequeathing considerable property. From the mention of his old age in 1400, he may be supposed to have been born

Illuminator presenting MS. to Patron.

[*Harleian MS.* 7026, *British Museum.*]

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about 1330. The few known incidents of his life are mostly literary, and will be best considered along with his writings.

Gower was the literary Cerberus of his day

> Who could pronounce
> A leash of languages at once.

Gower a polyglot poet

Not merely, like Milton and Landor, Gray and Swinburne, did he entertain himself with compositions in exotic tongues as a graceful relief to more serious labour, but he actually wrote three poems of ambitious proportions in Latin, French, and English, each entitling him to a considerable place in the history of the literature to which it belonged. Either the claim he made for himself was manifested, or his contemporaries' appreciation of his desert was recorded in the monument, still extant, erected to him in the nave of St. Mary Overies, the church connected with the priory where he had lived so long,

Effigy of John Gower in St. Saviour's Church, Southwark

now known as St. Saviour's, Southwark, and soon to be the Cathedral of the new diocese. Here the poet's effigy reclines, the head pillowed on three massy volumes, inscribed *Speculum Meditantis*, *Vox Clamantis*, and *Confessio Amantis*. Notwithstanding the Latin titles, the first work is in French and the last in English. This latter alone it is which entitles him to be regarded as an English poet, or with which, strictly speaking, we have any concern; while, at the same time, the others are too intimately associated with his history and character to be altogether passed over.

The "Speculum Meditantis"

As Gower's French poem, the *Speculum Meditantis*, is named first among his writings, and the other poems, whose date is approximately known, appear sufficient in themselves to have given employment for his latter years, this is reasonably supposed to have been the first in order of time of the three works on which he rested his reputation. The inference is supported by the existence of fifty French *balades* by him, which seem to present internal evidence of being the work of a comparatively young man, indicating that he composed in French before cultivating English or Latin poetry. In a poetical point of view they are the best of his productions, distinguished by much feeling and grace. They are accompanied by a long French poem on

the duties of the married state, of no great merit. The *Speculum Meditantis* was until recently supposed to be lost, but in 1895 was happily identified by Gower's latest and principal editor, Mr. Macaulay, with a French poem in the library of the University of Cambridge, the *Mirour de l'Omme*. The history of the discovery is curious. Mr. Macaulay, in conversation with Dr. F. Jenkinson, the University librarian, expressed his belief that if Gower's lost poem were ever retrieved, the French title would prove to be a translation of *Speculum Hominis*, not *Speculum Meditantis;* and Dr. Jenkinson responded by producing *Mirour de l'Omme*, recently purchased by himself and presented to the library. It is an edifying but tiresome performance in thirty thousand lines, treating of the vices and virtues, the various classes of persons in the world, and the return of the sinner to his Creator, and concluding with a life of the Virgin. It is full of learning and not wholly devoid of poetry. Being composed in French it must have been intended for the more refined class of readers, and shows the persistency of French in courtly circles long after English had become the national speech. "The verses, however," says M. Jusserand, "have an unmistakably English rhythm, and may easily be distinguished from French verse of the Continent and from that of the earlier Anglo-Norman writers." The allegory seems a foreshadowing of Milton's, though he cannot have known the poem. Death is not with Gower begotten by the Devil upon Sin, but Death and Sin engender the seven cardinal vices, who are all personified, as are the Virtues also. Every estate of Man is passed in review and condemned. It seems rather surprising that Gower should have turned from an allegory like this to write of Love, though even here he merits Chaucer's epithet, the *moral* Gower.

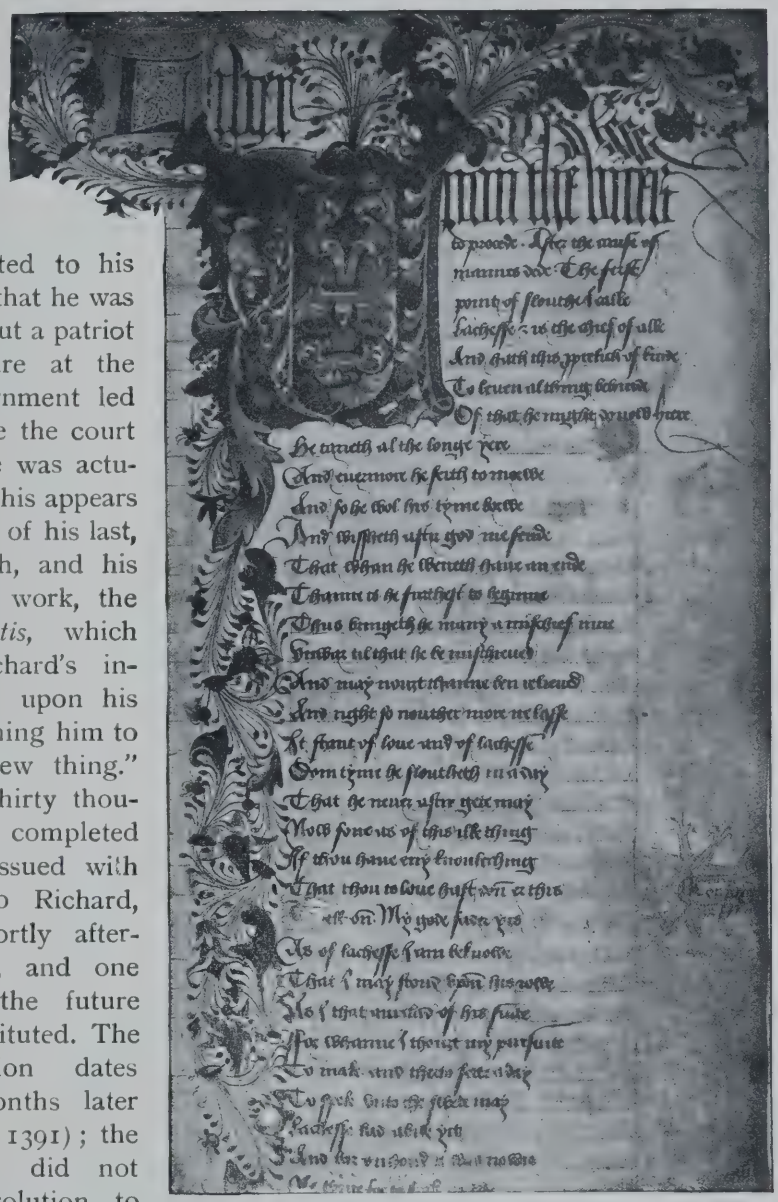
"Vox Clamantis"

The same title might be earned for him by his Latin poem, *Vox Clamantis*, commencing with a description of the rising of the common people under Wat Tyler and other incendiaries in 1381, and progressing into a general indictment of the iniquities of all orders of society, up to the throne itself. The social revolt had evidently greatly alarmed Gower, but he is more indignant with the vices of the clergy and the upper classes generally, as the cause of so disagreeable an effect. Nothing can be more remote from the sunny optimism of Chaucer, the contemporaries hardly seem to belong to the same age or country. The poem is written in Latin elegiacs, and divided into seven books, the first of which, describing the insurrection, comprises nearly a fourth of the whole. This was commenced in 1381, soon after the disturbances, but, perhaps from occupation with the task which we shall shortly see assigned to him by the King, Gower proceeded slowly, and the poem was not completed until near the time of the deposition of Richard. After this event it was published with a dedication to Archbishop Arundel, which shows that the heads of the Church were not indisposed to receive representations on the need of ecclesiastical reform, so long as doctrines were not interfered with. It is a very curious and valuable performance, but the Latinity is poor, and it has little poetical merit. It is accompanied by *Chronica Tripartita*, a history of Richard's reign from

1386 to his deposition, in rhyming Latin hexameters, besides some minor pieces, all severely condemnatory of the unfortunate King.

Shakespeare, with a truer instinct than Gower, has made Richard II. such an object of compassion that Gower's harsh treatment of him does not recommend the poet himself to our sympathy. It must be noted to his praise, however, that he was no time-server, but a patriot whose displeasure at the King's misgovernment led him to renounce the court favour which he was actually enjoying. This appears from the history of his last, his sole English, and his most important work, the *Confessio Amantis*, which arose from Richard's inviting the poet upon his barge and enjoining him to write "some new thing." The poem of thirty thousand lines was completed by 1390, and issued with a dedication to Richard, which was shortly afterwards removed, and one to Lancaster, the future Henry IV., substituted. The second recension dates from a few months later (before June 21, 1391); the poet, therefore, did not wait for a revolution to speak his mind, and must be allowed the credit of courage, while Richard is no less entitled to that of forbearance.

"Confessio Amantis"



From Gower's "Confessio Amantis"

British Museum, Harl. MS. 7184

Before arriving at the poem itself we have to face a prologue conceived in the most pessimistic spirit. The time is out of joint, and no one is born to set it

Prologue to the "Confessio Amantis"

right. It is a melancholy satisfaction to discover that complaints of competition and adulteration were as rife then as they can possibly be now, and that the agricultural labourers are as discontented as the new operative classes which did not exist in Gower's time, notwithstanding the peasants' recent acquisitions of wheaten bread, milk, and cheese, luxuries unknown to their ancestors. This agrees with the contemporary testimony of Piers Plowman, one nearer than Gower to the status of the labouring class, who almost regrets the time

> Whiles hunger was her maister : there wolde none of hem chyde,
> Ne stryve ayeines his statut : so sternelich he looked.

The Church is corrupt; professions and trades are dishonest; strife and division reign among all orders of society; the insoluble problem is how to make the lion lie down with the lamb. Happily the poet can always escape into an ideal world, and this gloomy portal conducts to a bright May morning where we encounter him walking in heaviness of spirit, indeed, but not for the world's sorrow but his own. Every bird, he reflects, has found its mate, but he is as far from his lady's favour as earth from heaven. In this mood, like Chaucer, whom he is doubtless imitating, he encounters Love and his Queen, and is maltreated by the god and comforted by the goddess, who bids him confess his sins against Love to "a priest of Venus." Gower, becoming conveniently stupid, professes himself unable to comprehend the instructions of this holy man except in a concrete form, and this clumsy contrivance introduces the narratives told by the priest in illustration of the transgressions of lovers, which display Gower at his best as a graceful, fluent, and occasionally powerful story-teller. There are no fewer than one hundred and twelve stories, mostly from classical mythology, such as the histories of Jason, Capaneus, Canace, Ceyx, Narcissus, Tereus; others from Scripture, as Jephtha's daughter; others from mediæval legend, like Apollonius and the examples of the Gesta Romanorum, or from actual history, like Alboin and Rosamond. In general, the collection may be regarded as an endeavour to fill the vacancy created by Chaucer's relinquishment of the *Legend of Good Women*, but the connection of the tales with love matters is not always very apparent. The story of Adrian and Bardus, for instance, is a vigorous illustration of the vice of ingratitude, but Adrian's unthankfulness is manifested towards one of his own sex, and he is by no means a second Jason. Two ecclesiastical histories are remarkable as evincing Gower's opinions on church matters. In one, following Dante, he brings in the apocryphal donation of Constantine to Pope Sylvester, not yet exploded by Laurentius Valla, as the source of all the corruptions of the Church. In the other, he exceptionally comes down to his own times to stigmatise Pope Boniface VIII.'s fraudulent acquisition of the Papacy by working on the superstitious fears of his predecessor Celestine, which, as well as his unhappy end, is related with sundry unhistorical aggravations.

General character of the "Confessio Amantis"

On the whole, the *Confessio Amantis* may be pronounced a good example of narrative poetry, and less marred than might have been apprehended by the author's didactic purpose. He has, indeed, as Mr. Courthope remarks,

"passed beyond the stage of art in which a story is told primarily for the sake of the moral it conveys: yet the moral is with him apparently quite as important as the tale." He is a man of books, while Chaucer is a man of the world, yet his cumbrous learning is often forgotten as his interest in his narrative kindles, and so long as his story is good he is not too careful whether it really fits in well with his moral purpose. Apart from narrative he is weak, the framework of his tales is pedantic and awkward, he indulges in long digressions for the mere sake of displaying his erudition, and the climax of absurdity is reached when the priest of Venus delivers a homily denying the existence and denouncing the worship of Venus herself.

Gower is too good a narrator to be exactly diffuse, but his octosyllabic couplet is unfavourable to condensation. It is therefore difficult to render him justice by extract within reasonable limits. We select an episode from a tale bearing much affinity to Boccaccio and Dryden's history of the *Spectre Knight*. Rosiphila, daughter of the King of Armenia, a princess rebellious to love, is brought to allegiance by a vision of a procession of fair ladies riding through a May landscape richly attired, whose train is brought up by a solitary lady poorly dressed and laden with halters. The happy dames, it is explained, have been eminent lovers, while their attendant is punished for her hardness of heart. She has, nevertheless, a golden bridle:

Now tell me then, I you beseech,
Whereof that riché bridle serveth.
With that her chere[1] away she swerveth,
And gan to weep, and thus she told;
This bridle which ye now behold
So rich upon my horse's head,
Madam, afore, ere I was dead,
When I was in my lusty life
There fell into my heart a strife
Of lové, which me overcome;
So that thereafter heed I nom,[2]
And thoughte I woldé love a knight;
That lasted well a forténight;
For it no longer mighté last.
But now, alas, too laté war
That I ne hadde him loved ar.
For death came so in hasté byme,
Ere I thereto had any time
That it ne mighté bin achieved.
But for all that I am relieved
Of that my will was good thereto,
That Lové soffreth it be so
That I shall such a bridle wear.
Now have ye heard all mine answere.
To God, madam, I you betake,[3]
And warneth allé for my sake,
Of Lové that they be not idle,
And bid them think upon my bridle.
And with that word all suddenly
She passeth, as it were a sky,[4]

[1] Face. [2] Took. [3] Commend. [4] Cloud.

All clean out of this lady's sight :
And tho for fear her heart afflite,
And saidé to herself, 'alas !
I am right in the samé cas.
But if I live after this day
I shall amend it, if I may.'
And thus homeward the lady went,
And changéd all her first intent
Within her heart, and gan to swear
That she no halters woldé bear.

It will be just to Gower to show him not relating a story but writing from his own mind. The thought of the following lines that the strife of the world can only be assuaged by some divine minstrel is beautiful, and like an echo of Plato, though Arion usurps the functions of Orpheus, who frequently appears in early Christian paintings as an emblem of the Saviour :

But wold God that now were on
Another such as Arion,
Which had a harp of such temprure,
And thereto of so good mesure
He sang, that he the bestés wild
Made of his noté tame and mild,
The hind in peace with the leoun,
The wolf in peace with the moultoun.
The hare in peace stood with the hound :
And every man upon this ground
Which Arion that timé heard,
Alswel the lord as the shepherd,
He brought them all in good accord ·
So that the common with the lord
And lord with the common also
He sette in lové bothé two,
And put away melancholie.
That was a lusty[1] melody
When every man with other low :[2]
And if there weré such one now
Which couldé harpé as he dede,
He might avail in many a stede.[3]

Gower and Chaucer

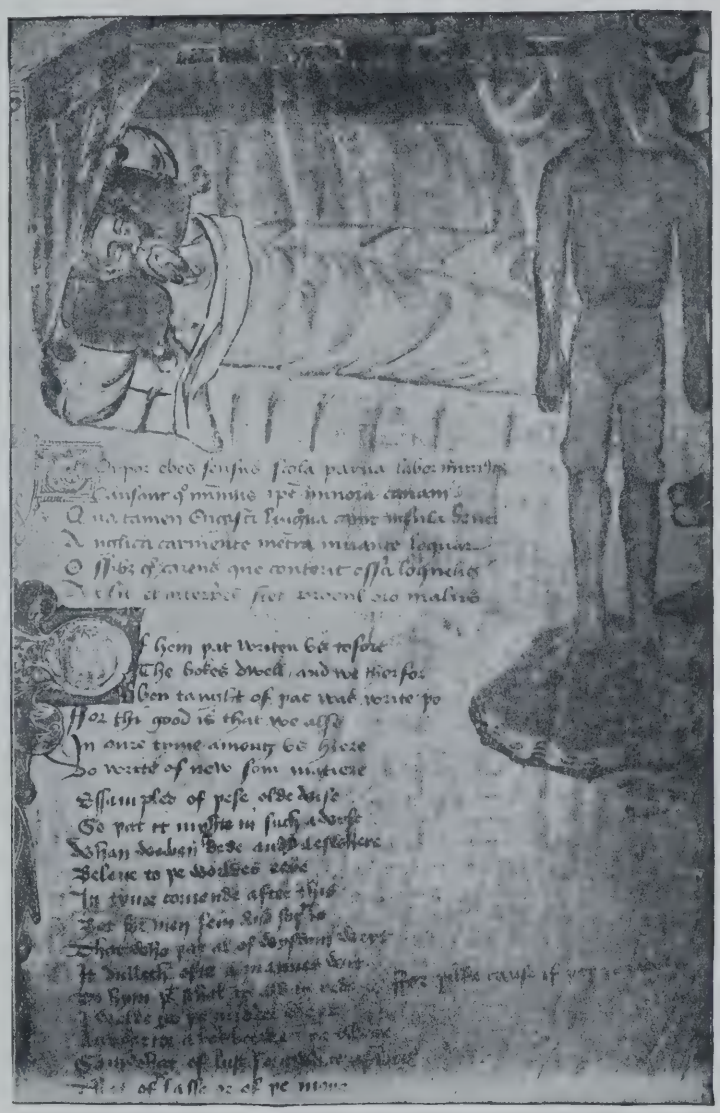
Gower's reputation stood high in his own day, and for nearly two centuries he was by many equalled with Chaucer. For the greater part of that period critical taste was very low in England, and the perception of poetical beauty well-nigh extinct. When these revived both poets were hidden beneath a veil of obsolete diction, which, lifted at last by criticism, revealed Chaucer fresh and blooming, Gower, in comparison, shrivelled and sapless. The recent growth of interest in him is not so much to be attributed to an enhanced estimate of his poetical merits as to a quickened perception of his importance for his times.

Their mutual relations

The relations between Gower and Chaucer were at one time most amicable. On Chaucer's departure on his mission to Italy in 1378 he left Gower as one of

[1] Delightful. [2] Laughed. [3] Place.

his "attornies" in England, and he commends, perhaps not quite seriously, *Troylus and Creseyde* not merely to his perusal but to his correction. Gower, on his part, in the first recension of his *Confessio Amantis*, brings in Venus herself to compliment Chaucer, but in the second recension (1391) all reference to Chaucer disappears except in one MS., where its preservation may be rather due to the transcriber than to the author. This is readily accounted for by an unkind thrust at Gower himself in the prologue to the *Man of Lawe's Tale*, which had been composed in the interim, where Chaucer congratulates himself on having written no stories turning upon incest, like those of Canace and Apollonius of Tyre, both of which, though Chaucer refrains from saying so, are related in the *Confessio Amantis*. But the attack itself has to be accounted for. No private cause is known, and it seems both needless and unworthy of Chaucer to suppose him actuated by jealousy at Gower, not content with his French and Latin laurels, having come forward as a rival English poet in a work ostentatiously vying with *The Legend of Good Women*. It is more probably to be connected with the change in Gower's political views, which has already been referred to. After he had begun to write



Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

From Gower's "Confessio Amantis," Harl. MS 3869

as an admirer of Richard II., his perception of the weakness and peril of the King's rule had driven him into opposition. Chaucer, whose political insight was less acute, and whose ethical sentiment was less intense, and who, in 1390, was enjoying a lucrative place under the King, remained loyal to Richard, and estrangement must have been the almost inevitable consequence. The situation brings out the difference between the poets: Chaucer the artist, making the most of life as he sees it; Gower the moralist, endeavouring to weigh its purpose and discriminate its right and wrong. Yet Gower is not entirely a didactic poet. He tells us himself that he aims at finding the middle way between Wisdom and Pleasure:

> But for men saine, and sothe it is,
> That who that al of wisdom writ
> It dulleth ofte a mannés wit
> To hem that shall it all day rede;
> For thilké cause, if that ye rede,
> I woldé go the middle way,
> And write a boke betwene the twey,
> Somewhat of lust,[1] somewhat of lore,
> That of the lesse or of the more
> Some man may like of that I write.

This purpose he undoubtedly achieved. He would have held a higher rank in the English Parnassus if all his poems had been composed in English. They might not have been better as poetry, but he would have appeared a more imposing figure from the sheer mass of his work. Yet the thirty thousand lines of the *Confessio Amantis* supply "lovers of poetry" with Keats' desideratum for them—"a little region to wander in, where they may pick and choose." This character applies only to the *Confessio Amantis*. The lovers of poetry, as such, will, his *balades* excepted, avoid Gower's French and Latin compositions, which are, nevertheless, more important for the student of his age. Here he may complain of neglect. It is strange that such a work as the *Vox Clamantis* should never have been edited until 1850. The complete edition of his works upon which Mr. Macaulay is now engaged will leave nothing to desire.

Translations of Gower

One special distinction of Gower's *Confessio Amantis* should not be overlooked: it was the first English poem to be translated into other languages. Versions appeared even in Spain and Portugal. Gower's celebrity as an English poet would be enhanced if some one with Mr. Andrew Lang's or Mr. John Payne's felicity in translating old French poetry would render his *balades* into our vernacular. The late Professor Henry Morley has given a graceful specimen:

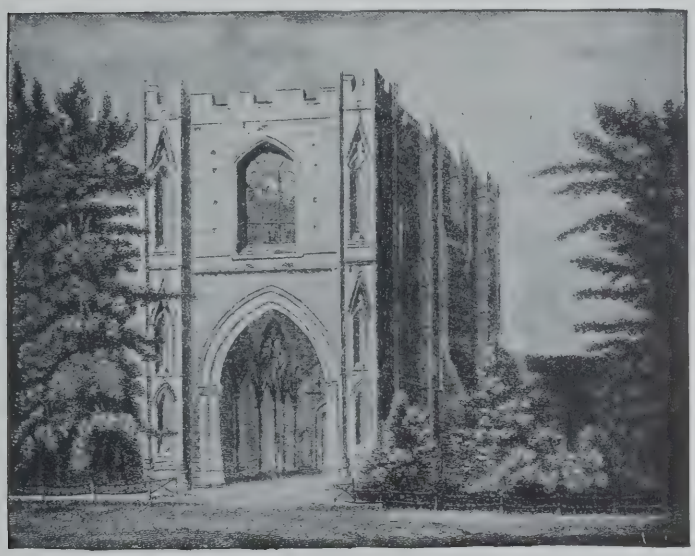
> Winter departs, and comes the flowery May,
> And round from cold to heat the seasons fly;
> The bird that to its nest had lost the way
> Rebuilds it that it may rejoice thereby.

[1] Pleasure.

Like change in my love's world I now descry,
With such a hope I comfort myself here;
And you, my lady, on this truth rely,
When grief departs the coming joys are near.

My lady sweet, by that which now I say
You may discover how my heart beats high,
That serves you and has served for many a day,
As it will serve you daily till I die.
Remember then, my lady, knowing why,
That my desire for you will never veer,
As God wills that it be, so be our tie:
When grief departs the coming joys are near

The day that news of you came where I lay
It seemed there was no grief could make men sigh



View of the Abbey, Bury St. Edmond
From "History of St. Edmonsbury," 1805

Wherefore of you, dear lady mine, I pray,
By your own message—when you will, not I
Send me what you think best as a reply,
Wherewith my heart can keep itself from fear;
And, lady, search the reason of my cry,
When grief departs the coming joys are near.

O noble dame, to you this note shall hie,
And when God wills I follow to my dear.
This writing speaks and says, till I am by,
When grief departs the coming joys are near.

John Lydgate

Chaucer's mantle fell upon no one, but he has two train-bearers among whose chief merits it is that they loyally present themselves in this capacity. JOHN LYDGATE and THOMAS HOCCLEVE, both of whom lived from about 1370 to about 1450, profess themselves his disciples, and continue his tradition as it is given them to do. The Muse's largesse to either is certainly not over

bounteous, except in point of fluency and facility. The last reproach to be addressed to either of them is Byron's to the bard of *The Pleasures of Hope*. "Campbell's Hippocrene is somewhat drouthy." If only their effusions were really derived from the *fons caballinus!* but this is far more than can be asserted as regards Hoccleve's. With Lydgate the case is somewhat different. It is not wonderful that his stupendous faculty for prosing in verse should have provoked some good critics into denying him the title of poet, but they have overlooked his possession of an infallible criterion of the poetical gift. He is frequently under the influence of a genuine musical inspiration. When not thus upborne his versification is liable to be incorrect, especially in his heroic couplets; but there are many sustained passages vibrating with the melody which distinguishes the poet from the proseman, irrespective of the actual merit of his matter. This cannot usually be rated very highly in

Lydgate in his Study

From the fifteenth-century MS. in the British Museum

Lydgate's case, except for his charming gift of natural description, to which we shall have to render justice. Yet, even when he has little to express but commonplace, his metre frequently exalts him into poetry:

O thoughtful hearté, plunged in distress
With slumber of sloth this hugé winter night,
Out of the sleep of mortal heaviness
Awake again and look upon the light
Of thilké star that with her beamés bright
And with the shining of her shenés merrie,
Is wont to gladden all our hemispheré.
. . . . .
This star in beauty passeth Pleiades
Both of sky risyng and of shenés clear,
Bootes, Arcturus, and als Iades,
And Esperus whanné it doth appear:
For this is Spica with her brighté spear
That toward eve, at midnight and at morrow,
Down from the heaven adaweth[1] all our sorrow

[1] Scares away.

And dryeth up the bitter tearés wete
Of Aurorá after the morrow gray
That she in weeping doth on flowers flete,[1]
In lusty April and in freshé May,
And cometh Phœbus the bright sunné's day
With his wain gold-yborned[2] bright and fair,
To enchace the mystés of our cloudy air.

These stanzas from the beginning of *The Life of Our Lady* (*Stella Maris*) manifestly proceed from a singer and not from a mechanical versifier. After a while the music flags, and the poem with it.

Lydgate is, perhaps, the only considerable English poet who has followed the monastic rule of life. He was born at a small Suffolk village near Newmarket, of the same name as his own, about 1370. He was probably educated at the monastery of Bury St. Edmunds, to which he afterwards belonged, for hardly any other circumstance would account for a boy so antipathetic to study and good behaviour, as in his *Testament* he describes himself to have been, becoming a monk. He received the minor orders in 1389. According to his own account, his deportment even then was not edifying until he was converted under a sudden impulse imparted at the sight of a crucifix. This may be assumed to have been before he received priest's orders in 1397, and his acquaintance with classical writers, even though much of his erudition may be second-hand, seems to indicate that he made up for early idleness by study. He seems to have been under but slight monastic restraint, spending much time in London, where he made the acquaintance of Chaucer, whom he holds up as the supreme English poet :

Whom all this land of right ought to preferre,
Sith of our language he was the lode-sterre.

The poems of Lydgate which manifest most traces of Chaucer's influence—*The Temple of Glass*, *The Flower of Curtesie*, *The Complaint of the Black Knight*—were probably composed during Chaucer's lifetime, or soon afterwards.

Lydgate's poems written to order

We shall have to speak further of the extraordinary decay of literary genius which befell not only England but all Europe, except Scotland, after the beginning of the fifteenth century, and can only remark here that, rate Lydgate as low as we may, his claim to rank as the foremost living English poet for nearly half a century cannot be contested. He would undoubtedly have filled the office of laureate, had such then existed in England ; a large portion of his poems are composed at the request of kings, princes, governors, abbots, mayors, and dames of high degree. The most important of these are *The Troy Book*, written between 1412 and 1420 at the command of Henry V., *The Life of Our Lady*, undertaken immediately afterwards at the same august prompting, and *The Falls of Princes*, after Boccaccio, composed nearly twenty years later by the injunction of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, the chief English patron of literature in his age. He devised masks and pageants, and wrote occasional poems on state affairs. He describes himself in middle life as a lean monk

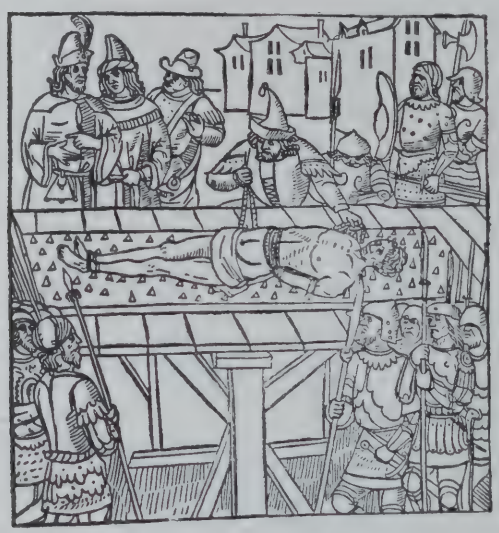
[1] Drop

[2] Burnished.

with pallid complexion, empty trunk, and threadbare hood; he nevertheless held lands on lease, and was sufficiently independent to resign the priory of Hatfield, to which he had been promoted, but which did not suit him, and return to his monastery at Bury. He died in or about 1451, rhyming to the last.

His merits as a descriptive poet

The fecundity of Lydgate certainly seems appalling, but many of his longest poems are translations or paraphrases. This is the case with the longest of any, the *Falls of Princes*, written, as above mentioned, at the instance of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, which is a rendering in rhyme royal of Laurent de Premierfait's French translation of Boccaccio's *De Casibus Illustrium Virorum*, and comprises more than thirty-six thousand lines. Some passages have genuine poetical beauty. Warton, a fine connoisseur of our ancient literature and not the least among its restorers, quotes with high praise for its harmony a couplet descriptive of the portents which preceded the strife of Cæsar and Pompey:



From Lydgate's "Fall of Princes," printed by Pynson in 1494

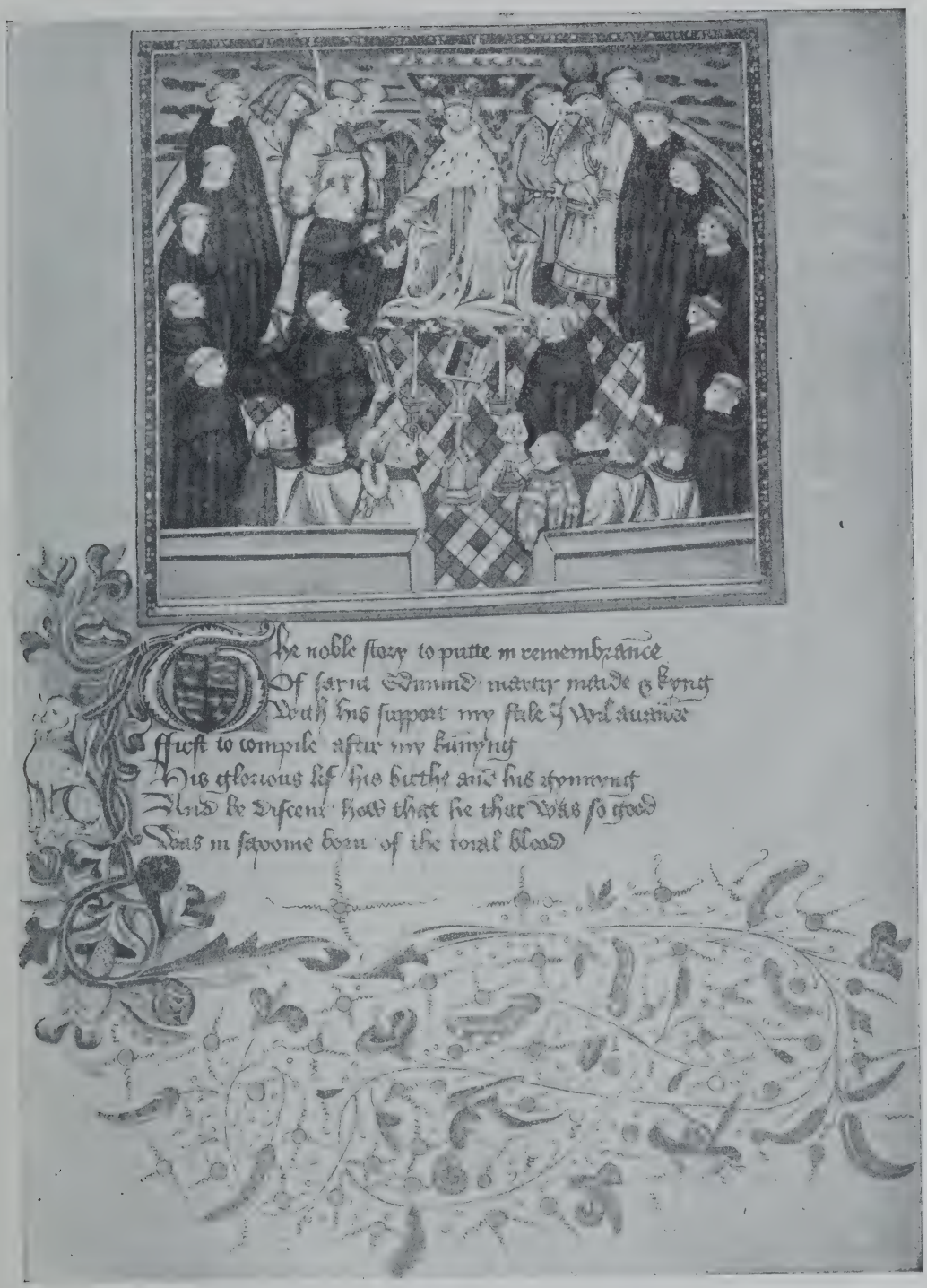
> Serpents and adders, scaléd silver-bright,
> Were over Rome seen flying all the night.

The fifteen thousand heroic couplets of the *Troy Book*, though not precisely a translation, are mainly paraphrased from Guido delle Colonne. Such works made little demand upon the poet's invention, and his talent is principally shown in his descriptive passages. Here, within limits, he is a master. Lines like these immediately transport one into the thick of tumultuous conflict:

> But strokys felle, that men might herden rynge
> On bassinets, the fieldes round about,
> So cruelly that the fyre springé out
> Among the tuftés brodé, bright and shene
> Of foyle of gold, of feathers white and grene.

The last three lines must have been consciously or unconsciously in the mind of the author of the passage already cited from the author of *The Flower and the Leaf*. Can he have been Lydgate himself?

The description of the architecture of Troy as rebuilt for Priam before the Trojan War is particularly interesting, and, as not the slightest attention is paid to the truth of history, brings the mediæval city before us in all the splendour that the poet's imagination could bestow. A fragment of his picture may still be beheld in the "rows" of Chester. Lydgate excels principally, however, in the delineation of simple natural phenomena, especially the shows of the sun


The noble story to putte in remembrance
Of Iarun Edmund martyr made a kynge
With his support my style I will auance
Fyrst to compile after my lykynge
His glorious life his birthe and his vprysynge
Nyld he descend how that he that was so good
Was in sapoyne born of the royal blood

Lydgate presenting his Poem to the King.

[*Harleian MS.* 2278, *British Museum.*]

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and the atmosphere. "The colour of our poet's mornings is often remarkably rich and splendid," says Warton, quoting the following passage in illustration :

When that the rowés[1] and the rayés red,
Eastward to us full early ginnen spread
Even at the twilight in the dawénynge,
When that the lark of custom ginneth synge,
For to saluë in her heavenly laye,
The lusty goddess of the morrowe graye,
I mean Aurora, which afore the sun
Is wont to enchace the blacké skyé dun,
And all the darkness of the dimmy night,
And fresh Phœbus, with comfort of his light,
And with the brightness of his beamés shene
Hath overgilt the hugé hillés grene ;
And flourés eke, agayne the summer tide,
Upon their stalks gan pleyn their leavés wide.

Such passages, of which there are many, show that Lydgate could on occasion write well in the heroic couplet, and it is rather to his honour than otherwise if for this he needed the impulse of genuine interest in his subject. His versification, the truest index of the poet's feeling, kindles into melody when he writes of nature, and drags when he puts history into rhyme. It cannot be doubted that the author of the following description in *The Complaint of the Black Knight* must have had a thorough enjoyment of the country :

And by a river forth I gan costey
Of water clear as beryl or crystál,
Till at the last I found a little way
Toward a park, enclosed with a wall
In compass round, and by a gaté small
Whoso that woldé freely mighté goon
Into this park, walléd with grené stoon.

And in I went to hear the birdés' song,
Which on the branches both in plain and vale
So loudly sung that all the woodé rong
Like as it shouldé shiver in pieces smale,
And as methoughté that the nightingale
With so great might her voicé gan outrest,
Ryght as her heart for lové woldé brest.

The soyl was pleyne, smoothe, and under soft,
All overspread with tapetes that Nature
Had made herself, celured[2] eke aloft,
With bowès grene, the floures for to sure
That in their beauty they may long endure
From all assault of Phœbus fervent fere
Which in his speré so hot shone and clere.

. . . . . .

Then sawe I eke the freshé hawethorne,
In whité motley, that so swete doth smell,
Ash, fir and oak, with many a young acorn,
And many a tree moré than I can tell,
And me beforn I see a little well

[1] Streaks of light. [2] Ceiled.

That had his coursé, as I gan behold,
Under a hill with quické stremés cold.

The gravel gold, the water pure as glass,
The bankés round the well environing,
And soft as veluet the yongé grass
That therefor full lustily gan spring,
The sute of trees abouté compassing
Her shadow casté, closing the well round,
And all the herbés growing on the ground.

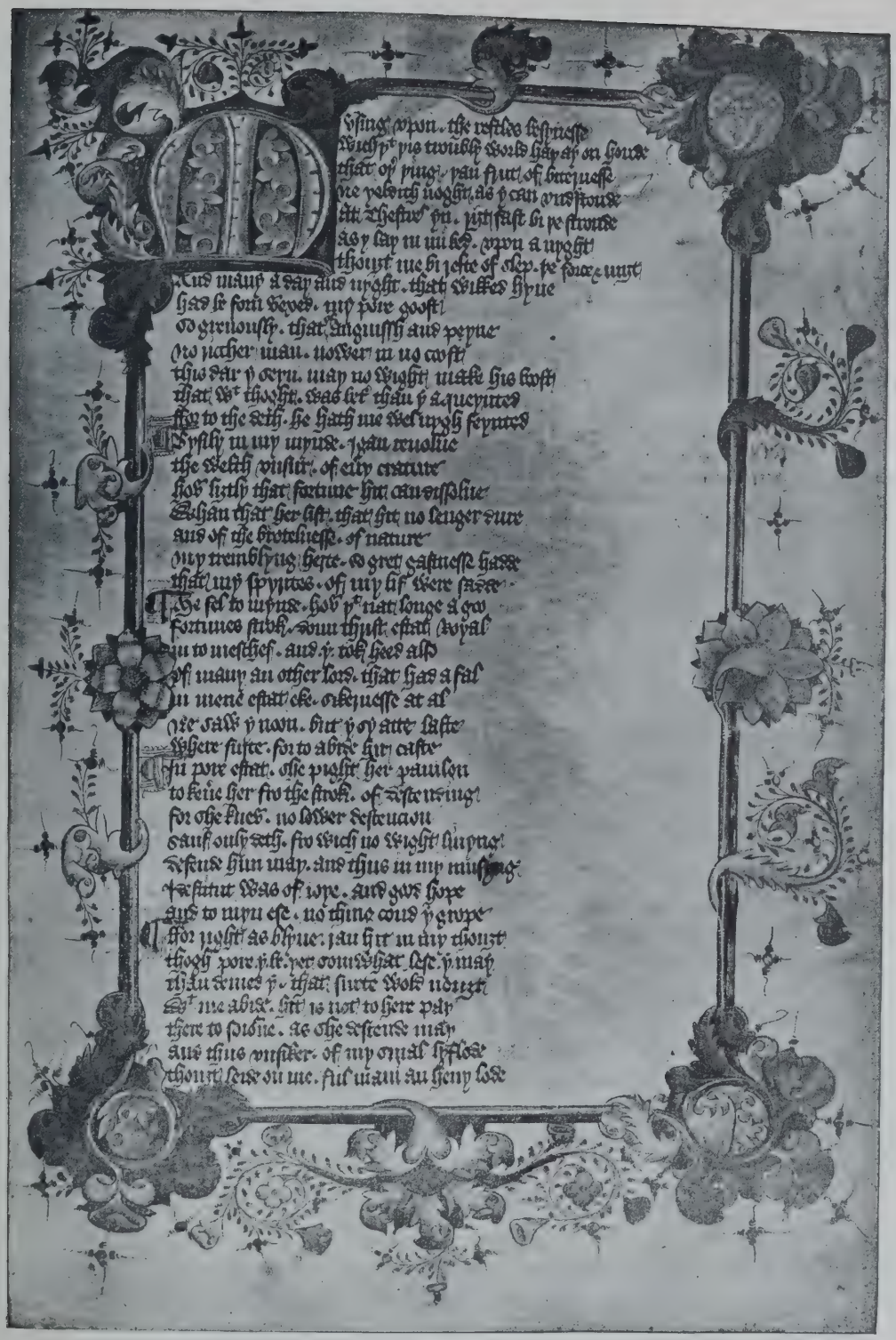
Lydgate's familiar poetry

Lydgate, it will be remarked, is enough of an observer of Nature to make the nightingale sing by day. The whole poem, as well as this description, is imitated from Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, and it is interesting to compare the different manner of the two poets, Lydgate painting a rich landscape by many elaborate touches, Chaucer producing a general impression by a few careless strokes. It, as well as other pieces of Lydgate's, appears as Chaucer's in the early editions of the latter's works. *The Story of Thebes* was designed as an additional Canterbury Tale, and written about 1420. A general enumeration of Lydgate's works would exceed our limits, nor is it possible to discriminate with certainty between the genuine and the spurious. A large proportion are no more than the work of a poetical journeyman, executing commissions for patrons. It may, at all events, be said that no other writer gives so good an idea of what the readers of that day cared to read. One class of his poems, nevertheless, is really original and peculiar, the lively satirical pieces in which he hits off the humour of his age. Such are his *Balade of the Times*, the *Description of His Lady*, and especially the *London Lack Penny*, pungently but good-humouredly depicting the inconveniences of a short purse in a great city:

Then unto Cornhill anon I yode
Where was much stolen gear among.
I saw where hung up mine own hoode
That I had lost among the throng:
To buy my own hood I thought it wrong,
I knew it as well as I did my crede,
But for lack of money I could not speed.

The taverner took me by the sleeve,
"Sir," sayth he, "will you our wine essay?"
I answered, that cannot much me grieve,
A penny can do no more than it may.
I drank a pint and for it did pay,
Yet sore a hungered from thence I yede,
And lacking money I could not speed.

Then hyed I me to Billinsgate,
And one cried, "Oh! O! go we hence!"
I prayed a bargeman for Goddés sake
That he would spare me my expense.
"Thou scap'st not here," quod he, "under twopence,
I list not yet bestow any almodede:"
Thus lacking money I could not speed.



From Lydgate's "Story of Thebes"

British Museum, Add. MSS. 18632

It seems remarkable that a ferryman's toll should have been twice the price of a pint of wine. The ballad, if really Lydgate's, which has been doubted, probably belongs to an early period of his life, before he had gained the favour and pursed the monies of kings and princes.

Thomas Hoccleve

We have spoken of Lydgate and Hoccleve as Chaucer's train-bearers, but must add that there is a great difference in the manner in which they respectively acquit themselves of their function. Hoccleve's poetical claims are far inferior to Lydgate's; it might be difficult to establish his title to any except such as the employment of rhyme and metre may confer. It is true, as a critic remarks, that he has refrained from afflicting the world with such a mass of dreary verse as it has received from Lydgate, but neither has he given it any such good poetry as Lydgate has done. He manifests no trace of Lydgate's talent for natural description, nor of the delight in natural beauty which prompted it; and this absence of inspiration implies a corresponding absence of melody. He apologises for this himself, admitting "how unconyngly my book is metred." Yet he has two marked advantages over Lydgate, though these do not concern his character as a poet. One is the more evident fervour of his devotion to his master, Chaucer. If Lydgate does well in this respect, Hoccleve does better; his references to Chaucer are much more numerous than Lydgate's, reveal a much closer personal intimacy, and are marked by deeper feeling. He has a clear perception of Chaucer's rank among his contemporaries and of the void which he has left. Death, he thinks,

> Might have tarried her vengeance awhile,
> Till that som man had egal to thee be.

Hoccleve's other advantage over Lydgate springs, paradoxically, out of his inferiority both in social position and in character. Both poets subsisted in a great degree upon the bounty of their patrons, but Lydgate accepted commissions like a fashionable painter, while Hoccleve sold his poems ready made. He could not consequently sit down to plan out poems on the scale of Lydgate's *Troy Book*, but keeps the wolf from the door by a succession of short pieces upon topics of general interest, for which he may anticipate customers. He is consequently very tame and conventional, but we learn more about the London of Henry V. from him than from his rival, if less about the Thebes of Eteocles and Polynices.

His life and character

Hoccleve was born, probably, at the village of the same name in Bedfordshire about 1370. He obtained a clerkship in the Privy Seal Office at an early age. Almost all that we know of his life and circumstances is derived from his penitent and biographical effusion, *La Male Regle*, thus amusingly condensed by his editor, Dr. Furnivall:

> When he got free and was his own master he naturally kicked up his heels, and at eighteen he seems to have bloomed into a smart Government clerk, waiting for a benefice that he never got. He no doubt jetted along the Strand in fine weather in the fashionable wide-sleeved cloak of the time, down to the Privy Seal Office in the Palace of Westminster, where he would see the Prince of Wales and the nobles mentioned in his

works, and have a chance of talking to them. As the Strand was not paved till 1533, in winter the way was deep, and Hoccleve took a boat from Chester's Inn (Somerset House) to Westminster, and there worked more or less. When young he was free with his money, stuffed and drank at the cook-shops and taverns at Westminster, paying whatever was asked, and instead of going back to the office after dinner went for an outing on the river. The waterman, seeing he was weak, called him "maister," which tickled his vanity—it was a term applied only to gentlemen—and drew money from him. Then he would adjourn to Paul's Head Tavern, close by the Cathedral, where he'd treat and kiss the girls, or to his dinner club in the Temple, and either at one of these places or at his rooms in Chester's Inn, sit up drinking all night and be loth to rise in the morning. And so the fun went on, as long as Hoccleve had or could borrow money. Then came illness and debt, his rents but four pounds a year, his earnings nothing, his pension in arrear, and his salary too.

His poverty and time-serving

Add in process of time a wife to be kept who did not model herself upon Griselda, and it will not seem extraordinary that a considerable portion of Hoccleve's poems should be entreaties for the more punctual payment of his dues, or pecuniary assistance in some other form. He recommended himself to the powers that were by writing bitterly against the Lollard reformer, Sir John Oldcastle; by frequently inscribing poems to the King and the Duke of Bedford; and by bringing French politics into his general advice to rulers, *De Regimine Principum*. The marriage of Henry V. and the French Princess Catherine is advocated as a healing measure, and the two nations are exhorted, as soon as they have made peace between themselves,

> Upon the miscreantes to maké werre
> And them unto the faith of Christ to bring—

a sincere aspiration both of Henry IV., who was led by a misunderstood prophecy to expect to die in the Holy Land, and of Henry V., who professed with his dying breath his ambition to have rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem. The *De Regimine* was written in 1411–12, just before the death of the former and the accession of the latter monarch. It is the most important of Hoccleve's works in compass and subject, but less valuable in every point of view than *La Male Regle*, written about 1407. He had acquired some poetical celebrity before this date by his *Letter of Cupid* about 1402. Here the imitation of Christine de Pisan raises him in some measure above himself, although the sentiment is far in advance of the diction and the metre:

> O! every man ought have a herté tendre
> Unto woman, and deem her honourable,
> Whether her shape be either thick or slender,
> Or she be bad or good, this is no fable.
> Every man wots, that wit hath reasonable,
> That of a woman he descended is:
> Then it is shame of her to speak amiss.
>
> A wicked tree may fruté none forth-bring,
> For such the fruté is, as is the tree;
> Take heed of whom thou took thy begynyng,
> Let thy mothér be miror unto thee,

Honour her if thou wilt honouréd be.
Despisé thou her nat, in no manere,
Lest that thereby thy wickedness appear.

In 1424 Hoccleve received a pension chargeable upon the Priory of Southwick, in Hampshire, and it may be hoped that this rendered him comfortable for his latter years, since he appears to have left off importuning patrons, unless by manuscript copies of his works written for presentation, some by his own hand, several of which are extant. One contains the best portrait of Chaucer that we possess. About 1449 he addressed a ballad to Richard Duke of York, and must have died shortly afterwards. Dr. Furnivall and Mr. Gollancz are at present editing his works for the Early English Text Society.

Prose compositions of the period

In the early stages of any literature poetry is certain to be more advanced than prose, for the necessity of conforming to rules of metre, and of aiming at some kind of poetical form, lifts the lowest writer in some measure above his natural level; while for a time the purposes of prose seem adequately served by ordinary colloquial speech. The first literary use to which prose is put is likely to be the expression of emotion, which we have seen admirably accomplished by Richard Rolle. Logic, rhetoric, artistic narrative, or verbal painting are much later acquisitions, of which the prose of Chaucer's time affords little trace. Unable to produce original treatises of much worth, English prosaists generally occupied themselves with translation. Infinitely the most important of their labours is the work of Wycliffe and the group around him in rendering the Scriptures, which we must reserve for another chapter. No less a person than Chaucer, however, occupied himself with translation, in his version of Boethius and in his two prose contributions to the *Canterbury Tales*. An extract from the *Parson's Tale* will exhibit his command of both the homely energy and the sweet artless rhythm which ought to characterise a youthful literature:

> Certes also that whoso prideth him in the goods of grace is eke an outrageous fool; for thilke gifts of grace that should have turned him to goodness and medicine turneth him to venom and confusion, as saith St. Gregory. Certes also whoso prideth him in the goods of fortune, he is a full great fool; for some time is a man a great lord by the morning that is a caitiff and a wretch ere it be night; and some time the riches of a man is cause of his death; and sometime the delyce of a man is cause of his grievous malady, through which he dieth. Certes the commendation of the people is sometime full false and full brittle for to trust; this day they praise, to-morrow they blame. God woot, desire to have commendation of the people hath caused death of many a busy man.

Travels of Sir John Mandeville

A century later Chaucer might have been a great prose writer, but the art of style was too undeveloped in his day, and English prose had hardly yet been applied to any strictly literary purpose. Abroad it was otherwise, and perhaps it was only to be expected that the first important work in English prose should be a translation. The example of employing prose for secular narrative and description was set by a work naturalised in England about the time of Chaucer's death, THE TRAVELS OF SIR JOHN MANDEVILLE.

This mendacious and pseudonymous production is, nevertheless, one of

the most remarkable books in our literature; a landmark as respects its style, its subject, and its universal popularity throughout Europe; a problem as regards the questions as to whether it can be rightly considered as belonging to English literature at all, to the author's identity, to his nationality, to the derivation of his materials, and to his exact position in the republic of letters, whether as traveller, romancer, or simple plagiarist. A great romancer he is undoubtedly in the guise of a veracious narrator, but are his tales his own? A great benefactor he undoubtedly is to English literature through his being, as Professor Saintsbury tersely puts the matter, the first English prose writer who set the example of a prose style. But is not this style the creation of some anonymous translator? It is to be feared that these questions must for the most part be decided in a sense unfavourable to this Junius of the fourteenth century, who appears unable to establish his claim to the appellation by which, nevertheless, when criticism has done its worst, he will for ever be known.

John Mandeville

From "The Travels" printed in Lyons, circa 1485

Mandeville's book, it is almost needless to inform the reader, is a book of Eastern travel. It will be convenient to state the questions relating to the personality of the author and the composition of his work before treating of this from a strictly literary point of view.

The book whose extraordinary marvels have justly procured for the writer the same reputation as that afterwards unjustly conferred on Ferdinand Mendez Pinto, was without doubt originally written in French. It therefore belongs more properly to French than to English literature, but, having taken no notable rank in, and exerted no special influence upon the literature of France, while it forms an epoch in the literary history of England, it may justly be reckoned among English books, provided that the nationality of the author can be shown to be English. This the book distinctly asserts, professing to be the work of Jehan de Mandeville or John Maundevylle, an English knight born at St. Albans, who departed on his travels in 1322, and wrote his account of them at Liège in 1356, as a relief from the pangs of gout. That the travels were really written at Liège seems highly probable, for until 1798 a tomb existed in the church of the Guillemins at Liège, with the epitaph of "Joannes de Mandeville

Problems relating to Mandeville and his book

alias dictus ad Barbam" (an alias to be borne in mind, as we shall see), "de Anglia, medicinae professor . . . qui, toto quasi orbe lustrato, Leodii diem vitae suae clausit extremum, A.D. McccLXXII." The Latinity seems to savour of a later time than Mandeville's, yet may well represent an earlier inscription, and the assertion made seems sufficiently distinct; yet the arms related to have been engraved on a brass plate upon the tomb are not those of any branch of the

"A Tomb with a reclining Figure (Aristotle) in front of a City built upon an Island"

From a fifteenth-century Flemish MS. of Mandeville's "Travels"

Mandeville family; the resident at Liège cannot be identified with any known Mandeville; and his story is perplexingly mixed up with that of another person whose existence is better established.

Probable identity of Mandeville

Apart from the sepulchral inscription, the only testimony we have of the existence of Mandeville is that of Jean d'Outremeuse or Des Preis, who wrote towards the end of the fourteenth century a *Myrour des Histoires,* or general chronicle, from the fourth book of which, while it was yet extant in the

seventeenth century, Louis Abry copied the statement that in 1372 there died at Liège a very distinguished man who had passed under the name of "Jean de Bourgogne dit a la barbe," but who had revealed to D'Outremeuse on his death-bed that he was in reality a banished English nobleman, "Messire Jean de Mandeville, chevalier, comte de Montfort en Angleterre." This personage, having had the misfortune to kill another nobleman, bound himself as a penance to traverse the three parts of the then known world. He settled at Liège in 1343, passing under the name of Jean de Bourgogne, and approving himself a great naturalist, philosopher, and astrologer, which agrees with the description of "Joannes de Mandeville alias dictus ad Barbam" in the Latin epitaph above quoted, as a physician. D'Outremeuse, then, if he can be relied upon, regarded Jean de Mandeville and Jean de Bourgogne or de la Barbe as the same person. Which was the real traveller? Did Bourgogne assume the character of Mandeville? or did Mandeville lurk in the disguise of Bourgogne? or are they both aliases of D'Outremeuse himself? The Latin version of Mandeville's travels seeks to solve the problem by making Mandeville speak of having met Bourgogne in Egypt, and again at Liège, and of having there composed his work at Bourgogne's suggestion. But this Latin is clearly a translation from the French, for Mandeville begins by excusing himself for writing in French instead of Latin, and passages absent from the French text, as this is, must be regarded as interpolated. Apart from any connection with Mandeville, and supposing that Bourgogne is not a pseudonym of D'Outremeuse, we have evidence of Bourgogne's existence in a treatise on the plague written by him at Liège in 1365, and now extant in several languages, but the epitaph and D'Outremeuse's notice alike identify Mandeville with Bourgogne. It should seem probable, therefore, that Bourgogne is the substance and Mandeville the shadow; while a very curious piece of testimony, unconnected with Liège or D'Outremeuse, goes far towards enabling us to claim the author of the *Travels*, after all, for an Englishman. In the epilogue to his work, as already mentioned, Mandeville states that he left England in 1322. In that year John de *Burgoyne*, chamberlain to John, Baron de Mowbray, was in all probability compelled to fly his country. His master, who had in the preceding year taken part in a rising against the King's favourites, the Despensers, was executed upon their restoration to power in 1322; Burgoyne's own pardon for his share in previous transactions was revoked; he would have every reason to disappear from England, and it is quite conceivable that he may have found it convenient to pass for a time under another name. This may very well have been Mandeville, as the Mandevilles were enemies of Edward II.'s favourites, and in France *Burgoyne* would easily become Bourgogne. On the whole, though certainty is not attainable, there seems a reasonable probability that "Joannes de Mandeville, miles," is to be identified with "Joannes ad Barbam, medicus," and that the latter was what the former claimed to be, an Englishman of good family, while the distinction of being the first really good English prose writer, or, as it has been too magniloquently expressed, "the father of English prose," belongs not to him but to his anonymous English translator. The three English and the

five Latin versions are all evidently made from the French original, and in no case by the author himself, containing errors which he could not have committed. The standard Latin version was made at Liège, a strong confirmation of the author's and D'Outremeuse's statements that he dwelt in that city. The other four were made in England, a good proof that his work attracted special attention in this country, and that he was regarded as an Englishman. England also has more vernacular versions than any other country, while so great was the popularity of the book that translations appeared in all the chief European languages, and even in Bohemian and Irish. All translations except the Latin, so far as the evidence of the extant manuscripts extends, date from the fifteenth century. The earliest manuscript of the original French with a date was written in 1371, which agrees well with Mandeville's statement that he wrote his book in 1356.

His mendacity and plagiarism

There was no reason against Burgoyne, supposing him to be the author, employing the name of Mandeville if he thought fit: and a conclusive reason for his adopting some pseudonym may be found in a circumstance not creditable to him, the mendacity of his narrative. It is doubly unveracious, not only as being replete with fictions, but with fictions plagiarised from other writers. It actually transfers Cæsar's description of Britain to the Far East. It professes to be the work of an eye-witness, but, in fact, almost everything in it is derived from some older traveller or historian: and it would be impossible to prove that the author had seen any of the countries which he claims to have visited, though it is not improbable that he may have had some personal acquaintance with Egypt and Syria. To have published his book under his own name would therefore have been to have exposed himself to the awkward questions and damaging criticisms of *bonâ fide* travellers, from which he prudently screened himself by a pseudonym.

The following analysis of Mandeville's travels, abridged from the article upon him in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* by Colonel Yule and Mr. E. W. B. Nicholson (who was the first to discover his connection with D'Outremeuse), shows both the subject and the sources of his book:

CHAP.	
	Prologue.
I.–III.	The way to Constantinople, the Greek Islands.
IV.–V.	Constantinople, Rhodes, Cyprus, Egypt, the Sinaitic peninsula, mostly derived from the German traveller Boldensele.
V.–X.	Palestine, the most original part of the work, but indebted to Boldensele.
XI.	Syria and Tartary, the latter not from personal experience.
XII.	The Saracens and their religion, mainly from Boldensele.
XIII.–XX.	Journey eastward, mainly from Odoric.
XXI	Tartar history, mainly from Haytor the Armenian.
XXII.	The court of the great Khan, mainly from Odoric.
XXIII.	Customs of the Tartars, chiefly from Carpini.
XXIV.–XXX.	Chiefly romantic and fabulous matter about Prester John, the Old Man of the Mountain, the Tartarian lamb, the Valley Perilous, and the like, principally from Odoric, with a large admixture from other sources.

It is probable that Mandeville was not always acquainted at first hand with the authorities from whom he plagiarised, but knew some of them only in the

Speculum of Vincent de Beauvais. Tried by modern standards, he must be pronounced a dishonest writer. His merit is to have condensed and brought to a focus much of the Oriental lore, true and fabulous, which before him was floating about in a diffused condition.

The best compendious information respecting Mandeville will be found in the article in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* and in the article in the *Dictionary*

Astrologers on Mount Athos

From a fifteenth-century Flemish MS. of Mandeville's "Travels"

of National Biography by Dr. G. F. Warner, who first identified him with Burgoyne. Dr. Warner has also edited in sumptuous style and with abundant illustration the English translation preserved in the Egerton manuscript in the British Museum, which, according to Dr. Vogels, who has devoted especial attention to the subject of English translations, is an endeavour to restore the first English translation made from the Latin. A later version, coming directly from the French original, has superior claims to

the position of a standard text. Our extracts are taken from the modernised edition of Mr. A. W. Pollard.

THE KHAN OF TARTARY ESCAPES BY HELP OF AN OWL.

Afterward it befell upon a day that the Can rode with a few meinie for to behold the strength of the country that he had won. And so befell that a great multitude of his enemies met with him, and for to give good example of hardiness to his people, he was the first that fought, and in the midst of his enemies encountered, and there he was cast from his horse, and his horse slain, and when his folk saw him at the earth, they were all abashed and weened that he had been dead, and flew every one, and their enemies after them and chased them, but they wist not that the emperor was there. And when the enemies were far pursuing the chase, the emperor hid him in a thick wood. And when they were come again from the chase they went and sought the woods if any of them had been hid in the thick of the woods ; and many they found and slew them anon. So it happened that as they went marching towards the place that the emperor was, they saw an owl sitting upon a tree above him ; and then they said amongst them that there was no man because they saw that bird there, and so they went their way ; and thus escaped the emperor from death. And then he went privily all by night till he came to his folk that were glad of his coming, and made great thankings to God Immortal, and to that bird by whom their lord was saved. And therefore principally above all fowls of the world they worship the owl ; and when they have any of their feathers they keep them full preciously instead of relics, and bear them upon their heads with great reverence ; and they hold themselves blessed and safe from all perils while that they have them together, and therefore they bear their feathers upon their heads.

Every one will be reminded of the story of Mahomet and the spider. This was most likely the invention of a romancer ; but it may be suspected that the Tartar tale was framed to account for the veneration paid by some tribe to the owl, a relic of animal worship of which they had become ashamed.

THE IMPRISONED JEWS OF THE TEN TRIBES.

In the same region be the mountains of Caspian that men clepe Uber in the country. Between those mountains the Jews of ten lineages be enclosed, that men clepe Goth and Magoth, and they may not go out on no side. There were enclosed twenty-two kings with their people, that dwelled between the mountains of Scythia. There King Alexander chased them between these mountains, and then he thought for to enclose them through work of his men. But when he saw that he might not do it, ne bring it to an end, he prayed to God of Nature that He would perform that that he had begun. And all were it so that he was a Paynim and not worthy to be heard, yet God of his grace closed the mountains together, so that they dwell there all fast locked and enclosed with high mountains all about, save only on one side, and on that side is the sea of Caspian.

And yet, nathless, men say that they shall go out in the time of Anti-Christ, and that they shall make great slaughter of Christian men. And therefore all the Jews that dwell in all lands learn always to speak Hebrew, in hope that when the other Jews shall go out that they may understand their speech, and to lead them into Christendom for to destroy the Christian people. For the Jews say that they know full well by their prophecies that they of Caspia shall go out, and spread throughout all the world, and that the Christian men shall be under their subjection as long as they have been in subjection of them.

And if that ye wit how that they shall find their way, after that I have heard say I shall tell you.

In the time of Anti-Christ a fox shall make there his train, and mine an hole where King Alexander let make the gates ; and so long shall he mine and pierce the earth, till that he shall pass through toward that folk. And when they see the fox they shall have great marvel of him, because that they saw never such a beast. For of all other beasts

Illumination in "Travels of Sir John Mandeville."

[*From MS.* 24,189 *in British Museum.*]

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they have enclosed amongst them save only the fox. And then they shall chase him and pursue him so strait till that he come to the same place that he came from. And then they shall dig and mine so strongly, till that they find the gates that King Alexander let make of great stones, and paving huge, well cemented and strong for the mastery. And those gates they shall break, and so go out by finding that issue.

This is substantially the adventure in the *Arabian Nights* of Sindbad's deliverance from the charnel-house by following a fox or jackal.

MANDEVILLE'S APOLOGY FOR RELATING NO MORE MARVELS.

There be many other divers countries and many other marvels beyond, that I have not seen. Wherefore of them I cannot speak properly to tell you the manner of them. And also in the countries where I have been be many more diversities of many wonderful things than I make mention of; for it were too long thing to devise you the manner. And therefore that that I have devised you of certain countries, that I have spoken of before, I beseech your worthy and excellent noblesse, that it suffice to you at this time. For if that I devised you all that is beyond the sea, another man, peradventure, that would pain him and travail his body for to go into those marches for to ensearch these countries, might be blamed by my words in rehearsing many strange things; for he might not say nothing of new, in the which the hearer might have either solace or disport, or lust, or liking in the hearing. For men say always that new things and new tidings be always pleasant to hear. Wherefore I will hold me still without any more rehearsing of diversities or of marvels that be beyond, to that intent and end that whoso will go into those countries he shall find enough to speak of that I have not touched of in no wise.

Mandeville's conduct in leaving a crop of marvels for his successors to gather after him is indeed most considerate and Christian! In the English version this passage is followed by the statement that he had submitted his narrative to the Pope at Rome, and, more successful than Foote when he sought to beguile Archbishop Secker into revising his farce, obtained his Holiness's authentication of its contents all and sundry. "And so my book (albeit that many men ne list to give credence to nothing but to that that they see with their eye, ne be the author ne the person never so true) is affirmed and proved by our Holy Father in manner and form as I have said." This assertion is not in the original, and proves that the English version could not have been made before 1377, when the Pope returned to Rome from "the Babylonish captivity" at Avignon. No existing manuscript of this transcript is older than the fifteenth century, but it is not certain that those now extant were the earliest.

Merits of Mandeville's style

The above extracts will convey an idea of Mandeville's habitual style, and of the charm of his marvellous tales and quaint reflections, not unmingled with information of real value, generally derived from more serious travellers than himself, respecting the condition of the Oriental world. As Mr. Pollard observes, his pre-eminence among the prose writers of his day arises not so much from actual superiority of talent as from the application of his talent to themes of more human and practical interest than prose had hitherto essayed, and admitting of treatment in a more agreeable style. It may be added that if he had really been an English writer his prose would probably not have been so decidedly in advance of his contemporaries, but that his translators were able to progress by emulating a degree of refinement not

lycheth the blood of the beeſt that he ſle eth :and rentyth & haleth the other dea⸗ le ℔me meele:and deuourpth and ſwo⸗ lowyth it.

¶ De Leoperdo. Capm .lxvij

LEoperdus is mooſt cruel beeſt/& is gendered ny ſpowlebreche of a perde & of a Lyennelle as Jly⸗ der ſayth. libro .xij°./¶ For as Plinius ſa yth the lyon genorpth wyth the perdus other the perde wyth the lyennelle/ of ſu the gendrynge compth vnkynde perdes as of ay horle & of a the alle/ other of a maale & a male alle is gendrpd a mule ¶ As Jlder ſayth. the leoperdus is a ful reſynge beeſt & heedſtronge : and thurſ⸗ tyth blood/And the female is more cruel thay the male as Ariſtotle ſayth/and ha the dyuers colours as the parde hath: & purlewyth his prope ſterſynge & leppn⸗ ge and not rennynge/And pf he ſtabliſh not his prope ny the thyrde lepe other ny the fourth thenne he ſtyntyth for Jndig nacyon and gooth bakwarde as though he were ouercome: And is lyke to a lyon ny body: taylle & fete: but ny ſhape of the heed he is lyke to the parde/ And he is leſſe ny body thay the lyon/and therfore he dredpth the lyon: and maketh a caue vnder erthe wyth dowble entrynge & ou te goynge: and compth out at a nother / And that caue is ful wyde & large ny ep ther entrynge and more narough & ſtre⸗ ighte ny the mpdyll: And ſo whay the ly on compth he fleeth & fallith ſodenly ny to the caue: and the lyon purle wyth h℔ wyth a grete rele and etheth alſo ny þ ca ue and wencth ther to haue the mayſtry of the leoperde/ But for gretnelle of hys body he maye not palle freely by þ my⸗ dyll of the denne whyche is ful ſtreyght And whay the leoperde knowyth that þ lyon is ſo lette and holde ny the ſtreyght place: he goth out of the denne forwar⸗ de : and compth ayen ny to the denne ny the other lyde behynde the lyon :and re⸗ leth on hym behyndeforth wyth bytyng & with clawes: And ſo the leoperde hath ofte ny that wyle the mayſtry of the ly⸗ on by crafte and not by ſtrengthe / And ſo the leſſe beeſt hath otte the mayſtry of the ſtronge beeſt by dyſceyte & gyle ny þ denne: and dare not rele on hym openly ny the felde as Homerus ſayth· in li°./de pugnis & haſtuciꝰs beſtiaꝝ/ ¶ Libro viij° Ariſtotle ſpekyth of a beeſt þ hyght Ferculio/And Auicey callyth that be ſte Leoperdus/¶ A beeſt ſayth Ariſtotle that hyghte Ferculio etyth ſomtyme be nemous thynge and leketh thenne man nys dyrte and eteth it/And therfore hū⸗ ters hangyth ſuche dyrte in ſome veſſell on a tree/And whay þ leoperde cometh to that tree and leppth vp to take þ dyrt thenne the hunters ſleeth hym ny the me ane tyme whyle he is there abowte/and the panterа dooth the ſame & the perd⁹ alſo as it is ſayd there. ¶ Alſo plini us ſpekyth of the leoperde & ſayth/ that ſomtyme the leoperde is ſeke and dryn⸗ kyth wylde gotys blood and ſcappth by it the ſykneſſe ny that wyle.

¶ De Lepore. Capm .lxviij.

THe Hare hyght Lepus as it wer Leuipes: lyghtfote/for it rēnyth ſwyftly / And hyghte Lagos in grewe for ſwyftnelle ny rennynge. And libro .xij°. Jlyder ſayth that the haare is a ſwyfte beeſt fearfull and fyghtyth not/ And hath noo manere kynde of armou ee nother of ſwepey: but oonly lyghtneſſe of mēbres & of l℔mes: & is feble of lyzte

From Trevisa's translation of Bartholomæus' "De Proprietatibus Rerum."
Printed by Wynkyn de Worde about 1495

yet attained by their own language. The translators of the Bible, of Plutarch, of Camden's *History of Elizabeth*, of many other books that might be named, were to find themselves similarly braced and stimulated. A great translation may sometimes effect more for the language than a great original work.

Minor prose writers

Another translator of a celebrated book of English origin has not left us in ignorance of his name. We are indebted to JOHN DE TREVISA (1326–1412) for a translation of Higden's *Polychronicon*, printed in the fifteenth century by Caxton, and reprinted along with the original in the "Rolls Series." Trevisa also made a version of Bartholomew de Glanville's *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, of which the first printed edition was one of the earliest and finest books from the press of Caxton's successor, Wynkyn de Worde. He is credited also with several other translations which have remained in manuscript. All his work was performed for Thomas, Baron Berkeley, whose chaplain he was. The only original prose treatise of the age deserving of any notice is *The Testament of Love*, by THOMAS USK, and this not on account of its own merits, but from the singular fortunes of the author, and the circumstance of its having been ascribed to Chaucer. He had turned in 1384 evidence against John de Northampton, the seditious Mayor of London, whose instrument he had been, and composed this treatise to justify himself. He thus regained the favour of King Richard, only to incur the animosity of the party headed by the Duke of Gloucester, who compassed his execution in 1388. The book was composed somewhere between these dates. It is in form an imitation of the *Consolation* of Boethius, translated by Chaucer, and, the writer's name being for centuries disguised under an unsuspected anagram, it was attributed to Chaucer himself by his early uncritical editors (mainly because in Gower's *Confessio Amantis* Venus bids Chaucer make his Testament of Love in quite a different sense), and has actually been used as an authority for his life. It was not until our days that Professors Skeat and Bradley between them discovered and deciphered the anagram, and proved the author to be Usk. The book has been thought to evince symptoms of a desire to gain Chaucer's intercession; if so, it must have been written before December 1386, when Chaucer himself fell into disgrace. A more interesting book is "The Sixteen Revelations of Divine Love," and mystical meditations of the hermitess Juliana of Norwich, composed early in the fifteenth century. They are full of tender feeling, and have been four times printed.

CHAPTER VII

THE ENGLISH BIBLE—THE MIRACLE PLAY

The Bible and English Literature

THERE is no literature, at least no important literature, so largely indebted as the English to a collection of writings in a foreign language, produced under circumstances exceedingly dissimilar to any that ever existed in England, and which may for practical purposes be regarded as a single book. These writings arose in nations which not merely appear to have little in common with either the Teutonic or the Celtic forefathers of the modern British, but which actually belonged to a different race of mankind. Large as is the infusion of the Hellenic mind into the later books of the BIBLE, every individual author is not merely an Oriental, but one absolutely estranged in blood from all the families which have combined to form the British race. Yet, were it possible to eliminate from British literature whatever it owes to the Bible, the residuum would be like "the shorn and parcelled Oxus" in comparison with

> The majestic stream that flowed
> Right for the polar star, past Orgunjè,
> Brimming and bright and large.

Yet, on the other hand, if the literature of Britain is to some extent a derivative literature, there is no such other example of a literature having assimilated a foreign element so completely to itself. Latin literature owes everything to Greece, but Greek literature was by no means so thoroughly appropriated by it as the Scriptures have been appropriated by the English-speaking peoples. Reversing what has just been said, it may be asserted with equal truth that, could the Bible be erased from the consciousness of those peoples, it would forfeit well-nigh half of its influence over the world. If it is still a mighty power, it owes this, humanly speaking, to the reverence, and hardly less to the free handling, of England and the nations most closely allied to her in blood. The obligation thus conferred has been repaid by an elevation, a picturesqueness, and an affluence of beautiful sentiment which confers on the literatures of these peoples a great advantage over those which, whether from national incompatibility, or the impediments created by sinister interests, have been more or less debarred from this treasury of grandeur. All modern nations, indeed, have borrowed more or less from the Scriptures, and been more or less influenced by them as literature; but the Northern nations

alone, and more particularly the British, have so thoroughly assimilated them that they seem to have naturalised patriarchs and prophets as their own countrymen.

Vast influence of the Scriptures on England

This complete naturalisation of the Scriptures in Britain is, of course, mainly to be accounted for by religious considerations, and may be paralleled in some measure by the corresponding phenomena of the influence of the Buddhist sacred writings, works of Indian origin, in China, Tartary, and Japan; and of the Arabic Koran in Turkey and Persia. It is, indeed, an astonishing circumstance that the Turanian Turks and the Aryan Persians should have consented to receive not only their religion, but their law from the Semites; yet there is every reason to believe that the national thought and life in those countries have been far less permeated by the foreign element than the national life and thought of Protestant Europe have been by the Bible. For this there is an obvious reason: the Bible, in admirable vernacular renderings, has passed into European literature, while the Koran, for all practical purposes, may be said to have never been translated at all. It is even asserted that the Koran cannot be translated, that its beauties are incapable of transfusion into any foreign idiom. How differently the case stands with Britain and the Bible is known to every person competent to read English, and this very familiarity blinds us to the extraordinary and unique position of our literature in claiming as one of its two supreme glories translations of books which were ancient before it had itself so much as an existence. It would have been nearly a parallel case if Virgil, instead of composing an original epic, had translated Homer; if his version had become as thoroughly national a poem as his *Æneid* has; and if Cicero could have occupied the place in the literature of Rome which Shakespeare fills in the literature of England.

History of the English Bible

The history of the English Bible from Caedmon to the Authorised Version of 1611 is full of literary and personal interest. It is divided into two clearly distinguished periods by the Reformation. Before this great epoch translations were made from the Latin Vulgate, which in the general ignorance of Greek and Hebrew was invested with the respect due to the original. After the Reformation, versions were made from the languages of the writers. No longer proscribed, but encouraged by authority; no longer confined to manuscript, but disseminated by the printing-press; the Bible took a position and exerted an influence which had until then been unattainable. There is, notwithstanding, sufficient evidence that throughout the Middle Ages the national life had been largely leavened by the knowledge of the Scriptures which indirectly reached the people through liturgical services, ecclesiastical legends, dramatic performances, and the vernacular homilies of priests and friars. Not, however, until the time of Wycliffe do they become ostensibly an important factor in the mind of England, or assume a position in great English literature. The literary history of the English Bible practically begins with him; before, however, entering upon his relation to it, which is itself only a section of a wider sphere of activity, it will be desirable to trace

with brevity, as far as possible, the Bible's subterranean course through the mediæval age.

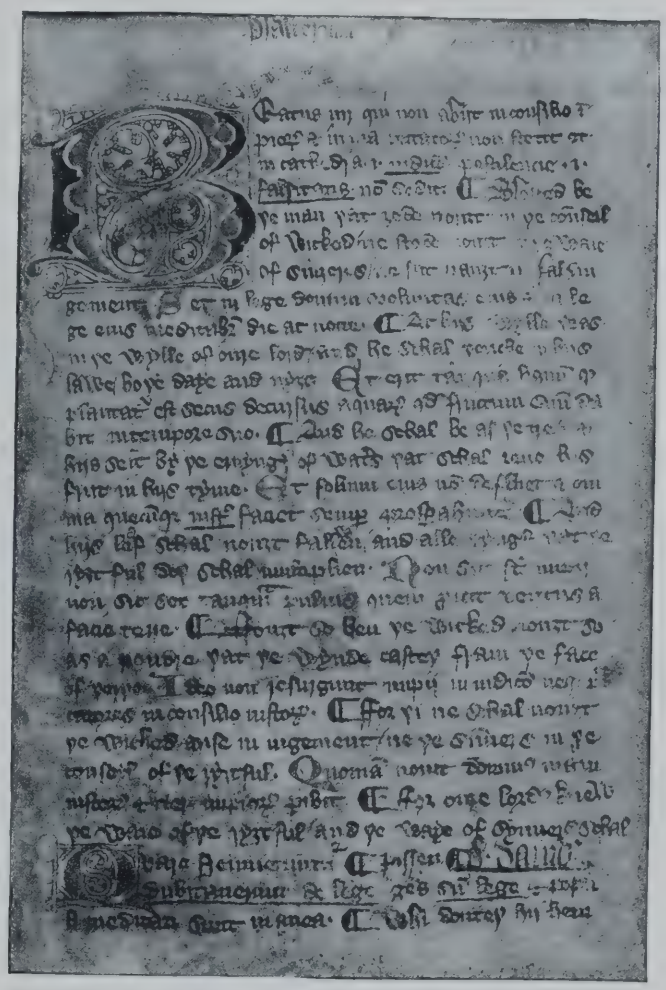
The English Bible in the Middle Ages

The almost exclusively religious character of Anglo-Saxon literature after the conversion of the people to Christianity has already been remarked. Several poetical compositions of considerable beauty upon secular themes remain, but the works of the chief literary representatives of the age, Caedmon, Cynewulf, and their disciples, are entirely Biblical or ecclesiastical. The poems attributed to Caedmon are mainly paraphrases of Scripture, and it is no more than justice to style them the first English Bibles. More precise and literal versions followed. Beda died while translating the Gospel of John, and translations of other portions are attributed by tradition to Eadfrith, Bishop of Lindisfarne, and to Alcuin in the eighth century, and to Alfred in the ninth. These, if they ever existed, have perished ; but the translated Psalter of Aldhelm, Abbot of Malmesbury and Bishop of Sherborne, at the beginning of the eighth century, survives in a single copy, edited by Thorpe in 1835. It is partly in prose and partly in verse. Next come some highly interesting examples of vernacular Scripture in the interlinear translations of the Vulgate text which are found in ancient manuscripts of the Gospels. The most important are the Lindisfarne Gospels and the Rushworth Gospels, priceless MSS. each provided with an interlinear Saxon rendering, most probably added early in the tenth century. These labours of solitary monks cannot be appealed to as proofs of a desire for Biblical knowledge among the people at large, but show at least that there were those who desired that the Scriptures should be accessible to those unacquainted with Latin. Such was the aim of Aeltric, the most celebrated Saxon ecclesiastic of his day, of whose extensive versions from the Bible we have already spoken. These would probably have yielded abundant fruit if Alfred had been upon the throne, but in the stagnant period immediately preceding the Conquest there was not enough mental oxygen to support combustion. The Conquest occasioned a great solution of continuity. The Normans do not appear to have at that time taken any interest in the Scriptures, and when at length the more thoughtful and devout portion of the community recovered in some measure from the blow that had laid it prostrate, the language of the old versions had become obsolete, and the foreign hierarchy discouraged the preparation of new ones. Cranmer and More nevertheless declare that such versions existed, and Foxe attributes their disappearance to the havoc wrought at the dis-

Portrait of Wycliffe

From Bale's "Illustrium Scriptorum Majoris Britanniæ," 1548

solution of the monasteries. These statements appear groundless: at all events, though there is sufficient evidence of a fair acquaintance with the leading events and personages of Scripture history among all classes, two Psalters by William de Shoreham and Richard Rolle are the only noticeable vestiges of vernacular Biblical translation between the age of Aelfric and the age of Wycliffe. Even these belong to the first half of the fourteenth century, a period when the influences pregnant with a Wycliffe were already manifesting themselves.



From William of Shoreham's Psalter

British Museum, Add. MSS. 17376

Bishop Stubbs, as we have seen, remarks a considerable deterioration in the ideals of the fourteenth century as compared with those of the preceding age. It would perhaps be more correct to say that new ideals were taking the place of the old. The mediæval conception of life had in the thirteenth century attained its highest development. Innocent the Third, Thomas Aquinas, St. Francis, St. Dominic, had in their respective ways developed it to the greatest possible extent, and Dante had enshrined it in a monument which, like other sacred fanes, might serve equally for shrine or sepulchre. Had Europe been China, the system thus wrought out might have been stereotyped for ages: but every thinking European admitted the possibility of improvement in the departments of secular information; and although to most contemporaries of Dante belief and knowledge appeared perfectly compatible, it was soon discovered that the extension of the one involved the modification of the other. The full exposition of this simple but momentous circumstance would lead us too far from our actual theme of the English Bible, but in one

Influences promoting a vernacular version of the Scriptures

of its phases it is too intimately connected with this to be passed over. The mediæval system of thought was not, like the ancient theology of Egypt, professedly complete in and sufficient to itself. It was admittedly based upon an earlier dispensation, with which it was bound to harmonise; the study of the documents of this earlier age, therefore, could not be omitted by the student of the later; and the resulting discovery that in fact they were not in harmony, but that the Church had diverged from the Scriptures in many particulars, could not but lead those who sought to correct such aberrations to bring their case to the knowledge of their fellows by placing the primitive documents before them, which could only be effected through the medium of vernacular translations. Hence the coincidence of that general dissatisfaction

View of Lambeth Palace from the River

Engraved by Hollar, 1647

with ecclesiastical corruptions of which Chaucer and Gower afford such decisive evidence with that movement towards the production of an English Bible which became personified in JOHN WYCLIFFE.

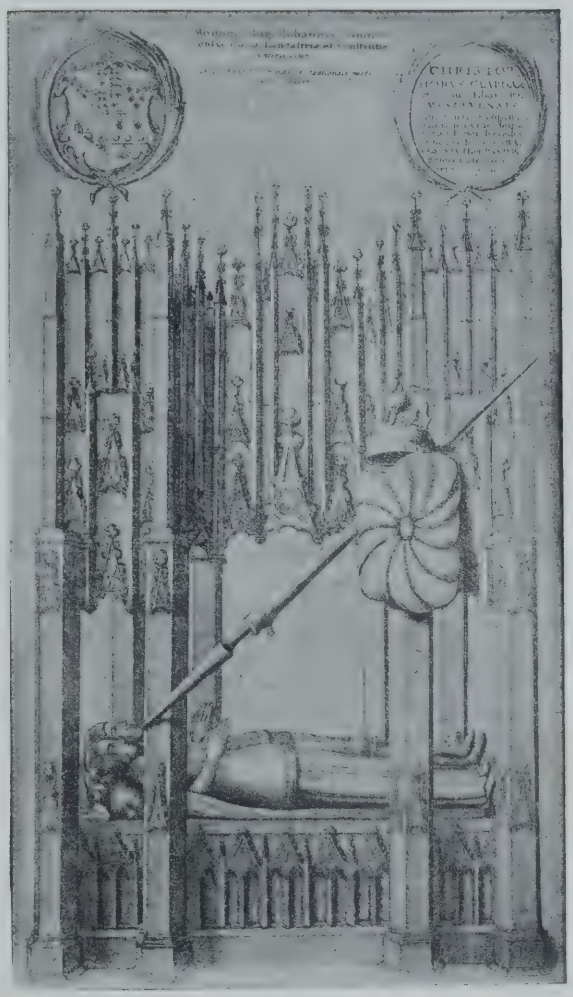
John Wycliffe

Wycliffe was a Yorkshireman, born, some time between 1320 and 1330, at Hipswell a village about a mile from the picturesque town of Richmond in the North Riding. Of his parentage we know nothing, but he may probably have been connected with the Wycliffes of Wycliffe, on the Yorkshire side of the Tees opposite Barnard Castle, a family of station, who had been lords of the manor ever since the Conquest. Of his early life nothing is known with certainty; but if, as is most probable, he is to be identified with the John de Wycliffe who was Master of Balliol College in 1361, he must have led the life of an Oxford scholar in divinity. It then took sixteen years for the candidate to arrive at the degree of D.D., and we are justified in picturing Wycliffe as an assiduous student, with thoughts for the time bounded by the knowledge he was seeking to acquire. Nor would such a training be unsuitable for the future reformer. It is noticeable—and the remark is true of all religious societies without exception, great or small, Catholic or Protestant—that the Church and the University take opposite sides. The Church labours to keep things as they are, the University to innovate. Church rulers, from the Pope to the Synod, are always more or less in conflict with the

University professor. We have not here to produce the numerous causes which might be alleged in explanation of this phenomenon, but merely to point out that Wycliffe might never have been heard of if he had been in his youth a parish priest.

Wycliffe as parish priest

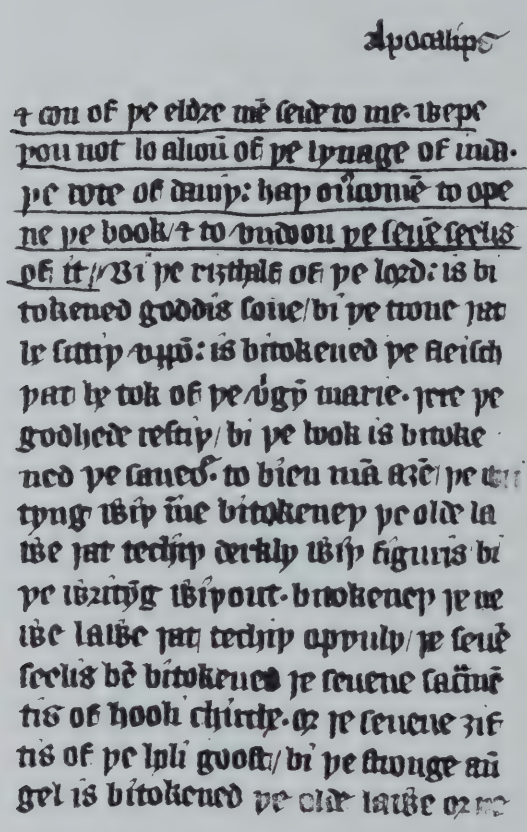
The Mastership of Balliol was not then the great post that it is now, and there seems no doubt that Wycliffe resigned it in 1361 for the rectory of Fillingham in the diocese of Lincoln, to which he was presented by the College. The identity of the master and the rector with the reformer seems certain, but other notices about this time probably refer to other persons of the same name. Only one is of importance. It has been disputed whether the reformer is to be identified with the John de Wycliffe who, in 1365, was appointed by Archbishop Islip to the headship of Canterbury Hall, a theological college founded by the Archbishop, and who unsuccessfully appealed to Rome against his removal by Islip's successor Langham. It is incontestable that the identity of the two Wycliffes was asserted in the reformer's lifetime by his adversaries, who imputed his hostility to the monks to his having been displaced in their favour. When, however, it is considered that another John Wycliffe was in 1361 presented by Archbishop Islip to the rectory of Mayfield, the place of the Primate's own country residence, and that the Archbishop endeavoured to annex this rectory to the wardenship of the hall he had founded, it can scarcely be doubted that the warden and the rector were the same person, and consequently that the warden is not to be identified with the reformer. This is the more probable since Wycliffe appears not to have taken the degree of doctor in divinity until 1372. He must by this time have acquired considerable reputation, for in 1374 his name is second in a commission dispatched to Bruges to settle disputes with the Pope respecting the intrusion of foreigners into English benefices, and similar abuses. If, as the St. Albans chronicler asserts, Wycliffe had in 1377 "for some years" been "barking against the Church," he



John of Gaunt's Tomb in Old St. Paul's Cathedral

probably represented the reforming party, which expressed the views of the Parliament but not of the Court. The mission produced little effect. It is difficult to date Wycliffe's first known literary production, a tract against the tribute claimed by the Pope from England, in which he cites a Parliamentary debate which may have occurred either in 1366 or 1374. The most important of his numerous Latin works, *De Domin. Divino* and *De Domino Civili*, in which he works out a thesis of Fitzralph, Archbishop of Armagh, that the gifts of God are conditional, and that deadly sin deprives a man of all right to possess anything, were probably written between 1372 and 1377.

Wycliffe and John of Gaunt



Extract from Commentary (ascribed to Wycliffe) on the Apocalypse

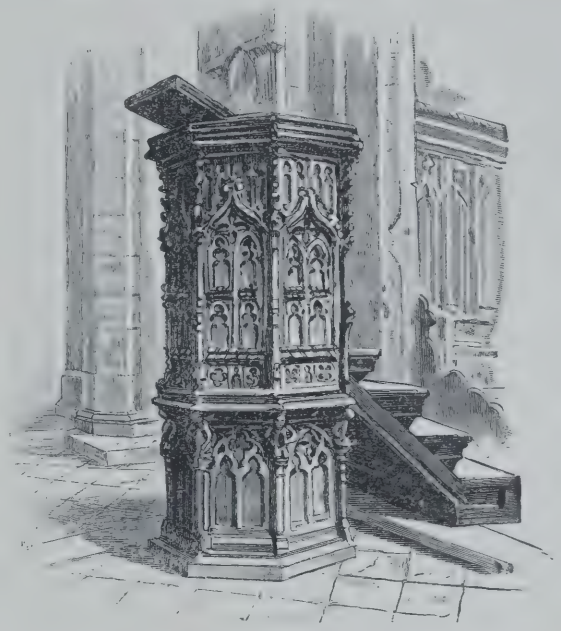
British Museum, Harleian MS. 3913

We are very imperfectly informed of the details of Wycliffe's activity during this period, but he had evidently become closely identified with John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, the most important person in the kingdom since the death of the Black Prince and the decline of Edward III.'s faculties, and who was bitterly opposed to the extortions of the Roman Court and the pretensions of the English clergy. Wycliffe must have made himself conspicuous as a supporter of the Duke, or the bishops would not have taken the strong step of proceeding against him for the heresies which they professed to have discovered in his writings. In February 1377 he appeared before the assembled prelates in St. Paul's Cathedral, escorted by the Duke of Lancaster and numerous supporters. A violent scene ensued between the Duke and the Bishop of London, the assembly broke up in confusion, and no further proceedings took place until the following December, when a Papal bull arrived enjoining that Wycliffe should be delivered into the custody of the Archbishop of Canterbury. But in the interim Wycliffe had been growing in influence and popularity; he had been consulted by Parliament on the lawfulness of stopping the exportation of money to Rome; the citizens of London, though antagonistic to his patron Lancaster, generally took his part; the University of Oxford, though censuring him for incautiousness, refused to condemn him as a heretic; when at length, February 1378, he appeared before the bishops at Lambeth, the young king's mother interfered in his favour, and a tumult among the citizens interrupted the proceedings. Wycliffe was directed by the bishops to desist from preaching, but paid no attention to the injunction. Like Luther at a later period, he had partly drifted, partly been driven, into a position of hostility to the Church which

he had no intention of assuming when he began his career as a reformer. In the year of his trial, 1378, an event occurred which could not but exert the greatest influence on his attitude towards Rome, the Great Schism, when the Papacy was claimed by two rival Popes, each with a plausible, neither with an unimpeachable title, each anathematising the other, and each receiving the allegiance of a moiety of Christendom. From this time commence those phases of Wycliffe's activity which have rendered his name immortal. Hitherto he had been an academical and clerical tribune of the people; henceforth it is his one purpose to bring the Gospel to the knowledge of the poor.

Wycliffe's organisation of his followers

The machinery employed by Wycliffe to this end was twofold—the organisation of a company of preachers something in the manner afterwards adopted by Wesley, and the translation of the Scriptures into the vulgar tongue. It is the latter alone with which we are concerned as literary historians; but it will be expedient briefly to trace the remainder of Wycliffe's life before describing the achievement which has given him his great place in the history of the English language and English literature.



Wycliffe's Pulpit in Lutterworth Church

According to the statement of a hostile chronicler, Wycliffe "gathered around him many disciples in his pravity living in Oxford, clad in long russet gowns of one pattern, going on foot, ventilating his errors among the people and publicly preaching them in sermons." These were at first obliged to be priests, but afterwards laymen were admitted. With this missionary organisation, with the support of princely personages like John of Gaunt, and with the sympathy of the University, Wycliffe might perhaps have anticipated the English Reformation by a century and a half but for the too rapid development of his own views and their identification in the popular mind with innovations in secular matters. That his reasonings on religious matters should have conducted him to the denial of the doctrine of Transubstantiation is nothing wonderful, but he was taking up a position to which the average mind of that day could not follow him, and justifying the accusation of heresy, hitherto regarded as frivolous. Here conscience left him no alternative, but he cannot be acquitted of indiscretion in pushing to injudicious and, indeed, fanatical extremes his views on the compulsory poverty of the clergy, and his animosity against the monastic orders, which ultimately came to comprehend the mendicant friars, of whom he had been wont to speak favourably. By thus stirring up questions which might well have slumbered, he not only estranged powerful supporters, but imparted a colour of fanaticism to his doctrine which rendered it easy to make him responsible for the excesses committed in the peasants' revolt of 1381, whose leaders, indeed, probably were Wycliffites, but much else also. Society was thoroughly alarmed,

and the tide turned against Wycliffe. Archbishop Courtenay, his old antagonist as Bishop of London, succeeded in 1382 in extorting a reluctant condemnation from the University, and Wycliffe retired to his Leicestershire rectory of Lutterworth. It speaks for the extraordinary influence he had attained, and the protection he received in high quarters, that his triumphant and exasperated enemies never ventured to molest him there. The condemned heretic remained in peaceful possession of his living, and went on preaching, teaching, issuing polemical treatises, and engaged, above all things, in the work which has chiefly made him illustrious, the translation of the Bible into English. On the last day of 1384 he died from the effects of a paralytic stroke which had befallen him three days previously. In 1428 his remains were disinterred and flung into the river in obedience to a decree of the Council of Constance, which had remained unexecuted for thirteen years, and probably would never have been issued but for the influence his opinions were exerting in Bohemia. It was there, indeed, that after the violent suppression of Wycliffism and Lollardry under Henry IV., the most visible traces of his opinions were to be found. Huss owed everything to him, and was the channel through which Wycliffe's opinions reached the German Reformers; the scholastic form in which they had been expressed, however, prevented their exerting any great influence under the changed conditions of those times. His pulpit remains in his church at Lutterworth; and a splendid literary monument has been erected to him in the nineteenth century by Forshall and Madden's grand edition of his Bible (Oxford, 1850), followed by the labours of Lechler, Shirley, Poole, Matthew, and other scholars; and of two societies which have published the writings attributed to him, some of them of doubtful authenticity.

Henry IV.

After the portrait in the National Portrait Gallery

Wycliffe and his disciples

Like Homer among the rhapsodists, Raphael at the Vatican, and many another leading figure in history, Wycliffe appears as the centre of a band of colleagues and disciples, participators in his work, and whose shares it is not always easy to discriminate from his own. There must long have been a wish among the more pious and enlightened members of the clergy and monastic orders to give the people the Scriptures in their native tongue. The accom-

plishment of this desire would naturally be impeded by the low state of education among the people in general, and by the politic apprehensions of the rulers of the Church, who could not but be well aware that the reading of the Bible without note or comment, or even with these, must be productive of heresy. Two distinct currents among those favourable to the dissemination of the Scriptures may accordingly be traced—the purely devotional, most powerful among monks and ascetics, and the doctrinal, represented by the Lollards, who, though not known in England under that name until Wycliffe's times, had existed from the beginning of the fourteenth century as protesters against the worldliness of the Church. That the devotional element had at first the upper hand is shown by the fact that the first translations from Scripture were Psalters; while the affinity between this tendency and the reforming movement is evinced by the popularity of the translator of the Psalter, Richard Rolle, among the Lollards, which probably deprived him of the honour of canonisation. Rolle, a hermit, was likely to be chiefly interested in the more spiritual portions of Scripture; the movement for the translation of Scripture as a whole would naturally spring up in the homes of learning, where men's knowledge and sympathies were wider, and was fitly impersonated in so eminent an Oxford scholar as John Wycliffe.

Wycliffe's version of the Scriptures

Wycliffe had begun early to comment upon Scripture if what has been alleged, though on no very convincing testimony, to have been his first work, a commentary on the Revelation, was, as usually thought, produced as early as 1352. It seems to have been in the form of lectures, notes from which were afterwards expanded into a treatise by his disciple Purvey. It can only be conjectured whether his attention to apocalyptic Scripture was actuated by the Black Death and the other recent calamities of his times. Eight years later, according to the date sometimes given, he is thought to be found engaged in the more momentous undertaking of a translation of the Gospels, accompanied by a commentary, not in the main his own, but chiefly rendered from the Fathers. If, however, the work really dated from this period, it can hardly have obtained much notice, as Wycliffe's adversaries make no reference to it until the latter years of his life. There is little doubt, nevertheless, that Wycliffe did translate the Gospels, and the version of the rest of the New Testament may also have proceeded from him. In the rest of his work he was, like Moses, upborne by two helpers, one a fellow-interpreter, the other a general reviser and corrector. Both were Oxford scholars.

Nicholas of Hereford

Nicholas of Hereford, a man to be remembered with honour, notwithstanding his subsequent backsliding, as the first English translator of the Old Testament after Anglo-Saxon times, was a Fellow of Queen's College, Oxford, where Wycliffe had had rooms, and appears in 1382 as a frequent occupant of the pulpit of St. Mary's, from which so many different views have been propounded, in support of Wycliffe's doctrines. Under pressure from the Archbishop he was in the summer of that year prohibited from preaching, was

excommunicated shortly afterwards, and immediately betook himself to Rome to protest against his condemnation. As he was detained in Italy until 1385, the year after Wycliffe's death, his translation of the Old Testament must have been executed by 1382. It finishes abruptly in the middle of the book of Baruch, as though it had been interrupted, and the remainder of the Apocrypha may have been translated by Wycliffe himself. Hereford was again condemned at Rome and sentenced to perpetual imprisonment. The troubles of Italy aided him to escape. In 1386 he was again in England, and seems to have been at large until about 1388, when he fell into the hands of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and was harassed until he consented to recant. His recantation must have been regarded as sincere, for he afterwards held preferment as chancellor and treasurer of Hereford, and is accused of having joined in the persecution of his old associates. In his latter years he became a Carthusian monk. In judging what seems his weakness or treachery, it must not be forgotten that some of Wycliffe's followers mingled religious reformation with views that struck at the foundations of society and estranged many who wished them well.

John Purvey

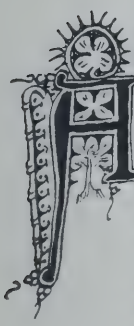
No such excuse need be pleaded for JOHN PURVEY, who, if for a while he bowed to the storm, proved a very Abdiel in comparison. He appears to have been born in Buckinghamshire, and to have been educated at Oxford. He was Wycliffe's curate at Lutterworth, and whether of his own accord or by his superior's injunction undertook a thorough revision of the Bible of Wycliffe and Hereford, with the special view of amending Hereford's cramped and over-Latinised style. Leaving Lutterworth after Wycliffe's death, he appears to have finished his work at Bristol about 1388. In 1390 he was imprisoned, but still found means to write. If his imprisonment lasted till 1401, the date of the atrocious statute *De hæretico comburendo*, it can hardly be wondered that his spirit should have been bowed to recantation in that year, when he was relieved from spiritual censures and inducted into a Kentish vicarage, which his conscience would not suffer him to retain. In 1421 he was again imprisoned, and he appears as a petitioner to Cardinal Beaufort so late as 1427.

Purvey has left us an account of his manner of proceeding, undoubtedly as accurate as it is quaint and touching :

> A simple creature hath translated the Bible out of Latin into English. First, this simple creature had much travail, with divers fellows and helpers, to gather many old Bibles and other doctors and common glosses, and to make one Latin Bible some deal[1] true ; and then to study it anew, the text with the gloss and other doctors as he might get, and specially Nicolaus de Lyra on the Old Testament that helped full much in this work ; the third time to counsel with old grammarians and old divines of hard words and hard sentences, how they might be best understood and translated ; the fourth time to translate as he could to the sentence, and to have many good fellows and cunning at the correcting of the translation.

It would thus appear that Purvey's work upon the translation of Wycliffe and Hereford, more particularly the latter's portion, went beyond the mere correction of the style ; that copies of the Vulgate were collated to ascertain

[1] Part ; German, *theil.*



ultreyude shal be tũed i to yᵉ lefte folc
of linde. for yᵉ y shal stãde for y wot yᵗ
unce thal not bere ye puple/ ye puple is
forcloye wᵗ an i3nard nol t shal be tũed
to lys lire ᵗ ye loud of lys cantire. t yey
shul wnte for yam ye lord god of hᵉ/ and
y shal 3yue to yᵉ am lire t yei shul vndw-
stonde. t eres t yei shul here. t yei shulu
pile me i ye lond of y cantire. t wyderful
yei shul be of wy name/ t yei shul tneu
awei yelelf fᵒ y hardenig t fᵒ y cludhed.
for yei shul remẽbre ye weie of y fadus
yat synneden i me/ t y shal azẽ clepe hẽ
i to ye loud yat y liwor to ye fadꝰ of hẽ
abrahã isaac t jacob. t yei shul lord
shupen of wy t y shal multrephe yẽ. t yei
shul not be lasted/ t y shal stere to yem
an oy testamnet euedurende yᵗ y be to
yẽ i to a lord. t yei shul be to me i to a
puple/ t y shal no more mone wy puple
ye lous of irl. fᵒ ye loud yat 3ak to yẽ/
Hod nous lord god of irl. ye lo ule i
aungyllhes t ye spirit tormẽtid. crey
to yee/ here lord t haue mcy for god yᵉ
art mcyful/ t haue mcy of vs for wee
han synned biffe yee yat sittist i to euer-
mor. t wee shul not pshe i to ye synnetuel
dnig/ lord god al mygti god of irl. hy
re nows ye orisoñ of ye deade mẽ of irl
t of ye lous of hẽ for yei han synned bi
for yee/ t yei hden not ye vois of ye lord
y god. t ioyned bẽ to vs cuelas/ wule y
not han myde of ye wickenelle of oure
fadꝰ. but haue myde of yu lorid t of y
name i yis tyme. for y art lord oure god.
t wee shul pile yee lord/ for for yᵗ y hast
3one y drede i to oure lires yᵗ wee shuld
li clepe y name t pile yee i oure cantire.
for wee shul be tũed to ye wickenelle
of oure fadꝰ yat synneden i yee/ t lo wee
i oure cantire ben to dii yᵗ vs y hast sca
tred i to repf t i to cursig t i to synne. aff
alle ye wickednelles of oure fadꝰ yatt
weenten awei fro yee lord oure god/ here
y irl ye misdedines of lit. wt eres par-
ceyue yᵗ y witte pdence/ wher is wt yᵗ
i ye loud of ye euenyg y art. you hast
eidid i an alien lond y art defoulid wᵗ
deade mẽ. y art set wᵗ mẽ gouernde cou
i to helle. y hast forlake ye welle of
wisdñ/ for if i ye weies of god y hadest
go. y shuldist han dwellid forloye i pes
vp on erye/ ferne wher be pdence wher
be vtue wher be vndstondig yᵗ y wi
te togidr wher be long abidig of lyf
t of lifelod. wher be list of ezeu t pes/

ch. 3ᵐ

who fould lys place. who cirde i to lys
treloꝛcꝫ wher be ye pnces of gentilys
t yat lord shupen of beftes yat lyf up ou
erye/ yat i ye bridres of heuene pleien.
yat silũ treloꝛcen t gold i wlynde citeu
mẽ t y is noon ende of ye purchasing
of hẽ. yat silũ forgeten t beu belyue
is endig of ye wisdo of hẽ. yei be out
lawid t to helle yei wente doñ. t oyn-
mẽ i ye place of hẽ risen/ ye zũge

Explicit translacõm Nicholay de herford.

Wycliffite Bible. Portion of Baruch, containing the name of the translator Nicholas of Hereford

Bodl. Douce MS. 369

the preferable readings, and commentators of reputation, such as Nicolaus de Lyra, consulted in hopes of their annotations throwing light upon difficult passages ; and that so many coadjutors were invoked that Purvey must be regarded as the principal of a small college or scriptorium. As his revision appears to have occupied more time than the actual translation work of Wycliffe and Hereford, it may be inferred that they had been less zealous for absolute accuracy. A translator of the Vulgate, well acquainted with Latin, would be able to proceed with great expedition so long as he did not concern himself with niceties, but, like the monk in *The Misfortunes of Elphin*, "took a single and simple draught of whatever was before him." If he undertook to balance the readings of the various MSS. his course would be much retarded. It is not said whether any use was made of the French version which then existed, and which is mentioned in Purvey's Prologue ; and the absence of reference to any more ancient English translations than Wycliffe's throws great doubt upon the assertion of their existence by Cranmer, More, and Foxe.

Character of the Wycliffe version

It would, of course, have been impossible for Wycliffe's version, even as amended by Purvey, to have established itself as the national translation, if for this reason only, that it was made from the Vulgate. No translation of a translation can take classic rank, and, could the general circulation of Wycliffe's version have been assured, could it even have expelled the Vulgate from the Liturgy, the completeness of its success, by stimulating the desire for acquaintance with the original language of the sacred writings, must soon have deprived it of special authority. It is, nevertheless, a memorable event in the history of English literature, greatly enriching the language and aiding to give it consistency ; although its limited circulation, the rudimentary character of its prose, and its derivation from an incorrect Latin version, forbade it to bestow that assured stability upon our speech which this owes to the Authorised Version and its immediate predecessors. When, however, it is considered that upwards of 150 copies of Purvey's recension are known to exist, notwithstanding the hostility of the clergy in the fifteenth century and the wholesale devastation of libraries in the sixteenth, it is clear that its influence cannot have been inconsiderable ; while it is no less significant that none of these copies appear to be later than 1430.

Purvey's revision

The translation to which Purvey's Prologue is prefixed is manifestly the later of the two, for he says, speaking of the errors of the Latin Vulgate : "The common Latin Bibles have more need to be corrected, as many as I have seen in my life, than hath the English Bible late translated." This late translation can be no other than Wycliffe and Hereford's. The object of his revision was not merely to amend the errors of the preceding version, which he commends by implication as being after all more correct than most copies of the Vulgate, but to eliminate obsolete expressions and soften asperities of style. It has been remarked that he allows himself more freedom as he proceeds, and that the latter part is nearer to modern diction than the earlier. It is, nevertheless, no more than a revision of the Wycliffe-Hereford translation, and the differences

and bringe vs out for thee and yif thou vs to fynde
grace before the face of the lord oure god. and
al the seed of israel for thou art lord oure god and
for thi name is inwardli clepid upon us
and upon the kynde of thi welbeloued lord for thou
holy hous of to vs and wrouȝte thi mercy ful
out aȝens vs. for thou hast yeue vs
to take fro thi lowe vessels. shuld ȝe make out of
lyuyng to the lord. but the soule that is
sory vp on the myȝtfulnesse of ȝeuel and sory
lowli and meeklich and ȝeue ful and
soule his seruyse and worschip to the lord
and bi ȝeue hym to the lond of his
exile. for thei ben sette in wildernesse and
in dispisyng of the wickednesse of oure fadris that
wickid to the lord. but for
thou hast ȝeue vs to the hondis of oure enemyes
in to the lond of exile. and to the
ruyne and to the hatere and to the wickidest
seruage aȝens the kyng of babiloyne. ȝe sul sitte in
and the lord
thou hast ȝeue to oure fadris that thei shuld not
do the heeste of the lord oure god to
worschipe to the kyng of babiloyne oure fyndis
and shuld make fro the eeris of ȝoure hertis
and shuld take awei fro ȝou
the vois of mirthe the vois of ioye the vois of the
mannes spouse and the vois of the mannes spouse and the
shuld al the lond be desolat fro the dwellers
to out and we herden not thi vois thi lord
worschipe to the kyng of babiloyne and to the seruyse
that thou hast ȝeue to vs and to oure fadris
and the wordis of the prophetis that thou spak
to vs in the name of thi seruaunt
whether the mouth of alle the bonys of
oure kyng and the bonys of oure fadris for thou
place. and thou hast take awei the heete of thi wra
and the fiyr of the myȝtfulnesse of the lord in
for alle thise thingis and stired and sende out
and the sentence of the prophetis that thei
ȝeue thou hast ȝeue to vs. and
for alle thise thingis we ben not schamed
of the lord in the vois of the hous of iuda and
hast don vs. lord oure god after thi gentilnesse
and after al thi grete mercy. as thou spak
in the hond of thi child moyses in the day that
commaundedest to hym to write thi lawe bifore
the sones of israel. saiyng if ȝe shul not here
my vois this myche multitude shal be turned
into the feste folk of hidis. for i wot that
i shal wite that the pople
the pople is forsope ful hard not and shal
be turned to his herte in the lond of his exile.
and thei shul wite that i am the lord god of hem
and i shal ȝeue to hem an herte and thei shul
here and thei shul worschipe me in the lond of
and thei shul bisie me in the lond of
and thei shul be conuertid fro the wickednesse
of hem. for thei han mynde of the weies of
hem that thei diden wickidli. and thei shul
and thei shul here and thei shul
and thei shul worschipe me and i shal ȝeue hem
thei shul be my pople
and i shal not forsake hem.

And now lord god of israel the soule in anguyssh
and the spirit of trauelid crieth to the. here lord and
haue mercy for thou art mercyful and haue mercy
of vs for we han synned bifore the. that sittist in
the eiȝte and we shul not perische in to the spiritual
dirknesse. lord god almyȝti god of israel here now
the preyeris of the deede men of israel and of the sones
of hem that synneden bifore the and herden not
the vois of the lord god to vs eueriche. whi
we han not mynde of the
knowyng of thi name and ȝyue to vs
and make pees bitwixe vs. that we knowe
alle the wickednesses of oure fadris that weren aȝen
the lord oure god. here me the mad
men of lyf. and ȝyue reste
and lond. that it be knowen that thou art the lord
oure god alone. and israel and his name is inwardli
clepid upon thi dwellyng place. lord god
and we ben thi pople. whom thou hast ȝeue
to the firste of the myȝtfulnesse and wraththe
and the fiyr of the myȝtfulnesse and wraththe
and the sentence of the prophetis that thei
ȝeue thou hast ȝeue to vs. and
for alle thise thingis we ben not schamed
of the lord in the vois of the hous of iuda and
hast don vs. lord oure god after thi gentilnesse
and after al thi grete mercy. as thou spak
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my vois this myche multitude shal be turned
into the feste folk of hidis. for i wot that
i shal wite that the pople
the pople is forsope ful hard not and shal
be turned to his herte in the lond of his exile.
and thei shul wite that i am the lord god of hem
and i shal ȝeue to hem an herte and thei shul
here and thei shul worschipe me in the lond of
and thei shul bisie me in the lond of
and thei shul be conuertid fro the wickednesse
of hem. for thei han mynde of the weies of
hem that thei diden wickidli. and thei shul
and thei shul here and thei shul
and thei shul worschipe me and i shal ȝeue hem
thei shul be my pople
and i shal not forsake hem.

Wycliffite Bible. Portion of Baruch, with which the translation of Nicholas of Hereford ends. Possibly in his autograph

Bodl. MS. 959

between the two have been greatly exaggerated. The following passage will afford the means of comparison :

HEREFORD.

And the Lord seide to Abram, after that Loth was divyded from him, Heave up thine eyes ever ryght, and se for the place in the which thou art now to the north and south, to the est and west ; al the lande that thou beholdest I shall give to thee and to thi seede, for to evermore. And I shall make thi seede as poudir of the erthe, if the men myght en noumbre the poudir of the erthe, and thi seede too shall men noumbre. Aryse thanne and overgo the lond in lengthe and in brede, for I am to gyve it to thee. Abram thanne, mouyng his tabernacle, cam and dwellide biside the valey of Mambre, the which is in Ebron, and bildide there an auter to the Lord.

PURVEY.

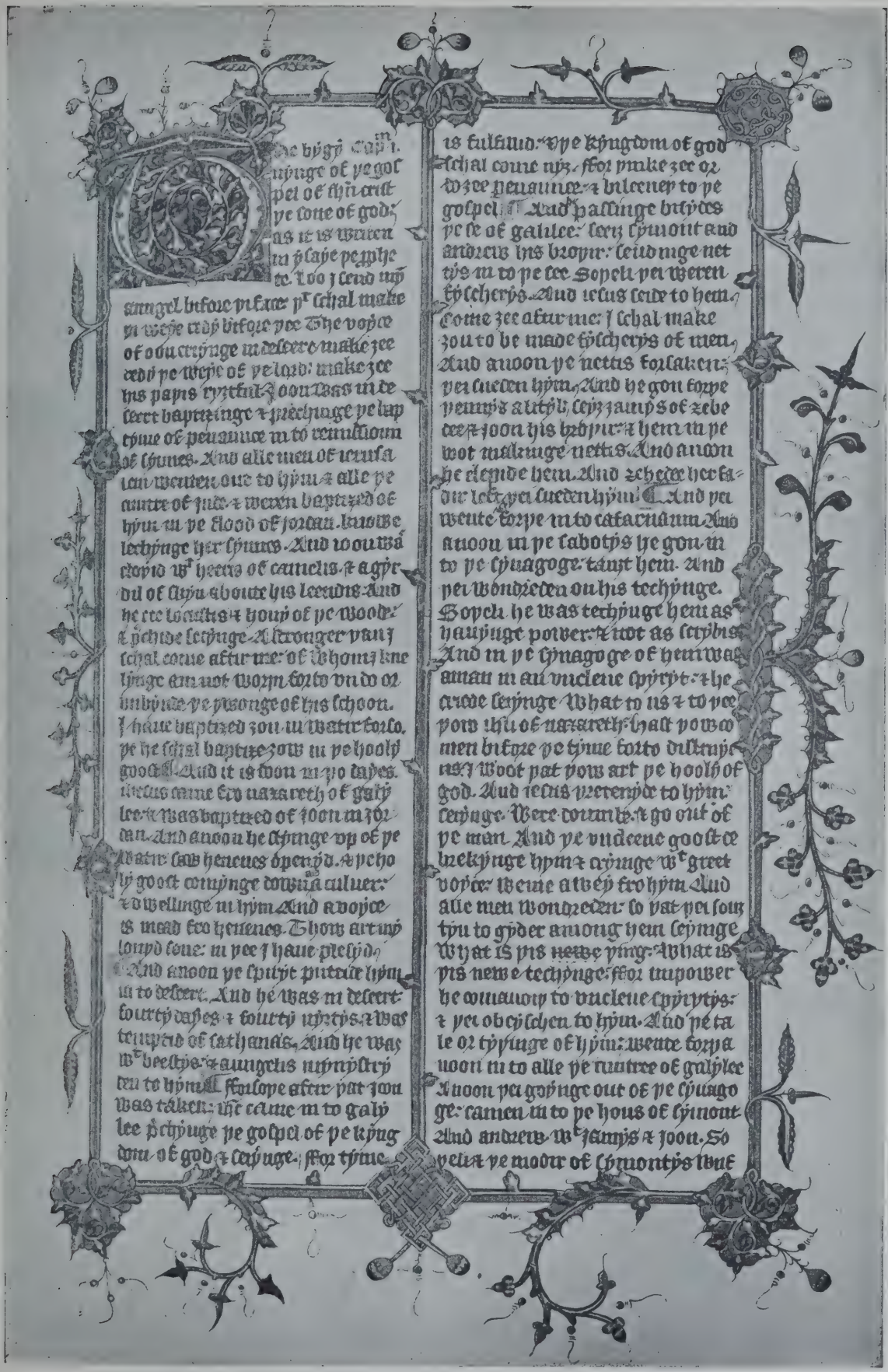
And the Lord seide to Abram, after that Loth was departed from him : Reise thine eyen forth right, and se from the place in which thou art now, to the north and south, to the east and west ; Y schal gyve al the lond which thou seest to thee and to thi seid, til in to with outen ende. And Y schal make thi seid as the dust of erthe ; if any man may noumbre the dust of erthe, also he schal now noumbre thi seid. Therfor rise thee, and passe thoroe the lond in his length and breede, for Y schal gyve it to thee. Therfor Abram, mouynge his tabernacle, cam and dwellide bisidis the vallei of Mambre, which is in Ebron, and he bildede there an auter to the Lord.

A comparison with the Authorised Version will be found instructive as showing how little the language has changed, and to how great an extent Wycliffe's is the basis of our modern English Bible.

And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward. For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth : so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and the breadth of it ; for I will give it unto thee. Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord.

Wycliffe's influence on the Authorised Version

Cranmer's secretary, Ralph Morice, tells us that when the new version of the Bible was undertaken in the reign of Henry VIII., "an old English translation" of the New Testament, unquestionably Wycliffe's, was copied and sent in portions to the bishops and other divines engaged, with directions "to send back their parts corrected." Cranmer's New Testament, then, was not regarded as an entirely new translation, and the similarity of the versions of the Old Testament throughout proves that they were treated in the same manner. When the Authorised Version was undertaken under James I., the first injunction to the translators was "The ordinary Bible read in the church, commonly called the Bishops' Bible, to be followed, and as little altered as the truth of the original will permit." It is hence sufficiently clear that, although the influence of Wycliffe and his coadjutors on the doctrinal controversies which chiefly interested them was small, their labours produced an effect of which they never dreamed in moulding the language. Had their version perished, the English speech it has so largely fashioned would have been a different thing. Left to themselves, Cranmer and his associates would have produced a noble



Wycliffe Bible.

[*Egerton MS.* 618, *British Museum.*]

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rendering indeed, but in all probability more ornate and more remote from the simplicity of the Saxon. Wycliffe, therefore, though he wrote in large measure by proxy, deserves a high place among the masters and moulders of English. A recent attempt to deprive him of the honour hardly merits refutation, any more than the extraordinary discovery that the Wycliffe Bible was authorised by the Church. The translators would have been only too happy to cite such a licence; but the attitude of the writer of Purvey's Prologue is that of one deprecating censure and dreading persecution.

Wycliffe's theological writings

The most important of Wycliffe's numerous writings are in Latin, and the principal among these are so linked together as to form a coherent system of theology. The English writings are of more temporary and occasional character. Many of them are, no doubt, the work of disciples, scarcely distinguishable in style, and still less in tendency, from Wycliffe's own. The influence of Wycliffe on the English language and literature was most salutary, and it is deeply to be regretted that it did not extend much farther. He could not, like Luther, create a literature, but he could and did prove the fitness of English prose for rendering the noblest works from other languages, and for the discussion of whatever interests mankind. Had an epoch of active literary production followed, English literature would have attained perfection and exerted an European influence much sooner than was the case. The triumph of the hierarchy under the Lancastrian kings, reinforced by the general intellectual stagnation which unaccountably crept all over Europe, destroyed all such anticipations. Wycliffe himself may be blamed for having lent strength to the reaction by the violence and fanaticism of his views on politics and property and other matters outside his proper sphere, but all causes may be summed in one, "the fulness of time was not yet."

It is difficult to form any positive opinion as to the genuineness of the works ascribed to Wycliffe, his sermons excepted. "The Grete sentence of Curs explained," from which we are about to give an extract, lacks sufficient external authentication, but breathes the spirit of the Reformer so completely that even if not from his pen, it may fairly represent the spirit of his writings:

> Of this may men see how perilous it is to covet prelacy or great benefice in the Church, sith no man almost cometh to them without pride, vain glory, and simony. Therefore said St. Gregory and the common law of the Church, that honour and prelacy should not be given to them that seek and covet it, but to such men as flee honours and dignity; and the same saith St. Austin and Chrysostom, with other doctors. For Christ teacheth us by St. Paul, that no man shall take honour to him but that is cleped of God, as Aaron was. Therefore Moses and the holy prophet Jeremy, hallowed in his mother's womb, excused them meekly when God bid them take the leading and governing of the people, and the holy prophet Ysaye durst not take this office at God's proffer till he was cleansed from sin by the angel's ministration, and inflamed with God's science and charity. Therefore St. Gregory and St. Austin fled at all their power to be bishops, but sought to live in devotion and study of holy writ and in low degree, and coveted not the highness of their states but with sorrow and great dread of God, and for great need of Christian souls, took this state, not of honour, but of travail and business, as Austin and Jerome witness. Lord! what stirreth us fools, full of ignorance and much sin, that cannot govern one soul well, to seek so busily great states where we shall govern many thousand, and for the least of them all answer at doomsday to the blood of Jesus Christ—guilty of shedding thereof if any

perish by our default? Where strong champions and pillars of holy Church dread so sore to govern a few souls, why rotten festues[1] seek so much charge? Certes it is full sooth that St. John with the gilden mouth saith, with law canoun, that what clerk seeketh or desireth prelacy or primacy in earth, shall find confusion in heaven.

Character of Wycliffe

None of the portraits of Wycliffe are authentic. A single contemporary testimony describes him as spare and ascetic, which may well be believed of one who led the life of a student all his days. He was even more of a scholar than of a popular leader, "in theology more eminent, in philosophy second to none." The purity of his moral character is shown by the absence of any imputations upon it, notwithstanding the number and exasperation of his enemies. His disinterestedness speaks for itself. His leading characteristic is a fervent zeal for righteousness; if this zeal degenerated into fanaticism he had much excuse in the circumstances of his time. He was less of a statesman than Calvin or Cranmer, and more of a prophet. In many respects he may be compared to Luther, but he lacked Luther's vigorous common sense. His relation to the reformers of the sixteenth century may be compared to that of the men of the Long Parliament to the men of the Revolution; the former were the nobler, and the latter the wiser; but the exaggerated idealism of the first was the indispensable preliminary and condition of the latter's durable achievements.

The religious drama

While a handful of persecuted men were thus endeavouring to give the English people the Bible in their own language, a knowledge of Scripture history was maintained and diffused by a totally different process, which had at all events the advantages of being as intelligible to the unlettered as to the educated, and of giving no umbrage to the clergy. This was the exhibition of sacred, including ecclesiastical, history to the eye by means of dramatic representations, which historians of the drama have distinguished, although the distinction is practically unimportant, into mysteries and miracle plays according as the subject was scriptural or derived from the legends of the Saints. To these was in process of time added a third class, moralities, allegorical plays in which the characters were wholly or partly personified vices or virtues. By this imperfect means some knowledge of the Bible was preserved among the mass of the people, and an ember kept alight ready to burst out into flame upon a favourable occasion. Equally remarkable in another point of view was the reappearance, in however disfigured a shape, of public dramatic entertainments at a period when the revival of the secular drama seemed inconceivable to the European mind.

Origin of the miracle play

It is needless to retrace the often told story of the suppression of dramatic performances upon the establishment of Christianity. This was even more complete than hitherto believed, for the drama on the sufferings of Christ attributed to St. Gregory of Nazianzus has been snown to be centuries later than his time. Pantomimic entertainments, indeed, of a low and indecent class, seem to have been largely frequented in the days of Justinian, but after a while even they die out, and the dramatic art is only represented by two very different classes of persons: strolling actors scarcely to be distinguished from

[1] Straws.

jugglers and posture-makers ; and erudite monks and nuns who occasionally produced Latin plays on sacred subjects, which may have been acted by their pupils. The palmary instance is the set of dramas composed in the tenth century by Hroswitha, Abbess of Gandersheim, poor as theatrical compositions, but whose Latinity would have earned them the character of fabrications of a later age, were not the palæographical evidence conclusive of their genuineness. It is not, however, to either of these sources that we can trace the revival of a mediæval drama in the miracle play. This must rather be sought in the dramatic character assumed by the services of the Church as a consequence of their language having become unintelligible to the bulk of the people. It assuredly never entered the minds of the early teachers of Christianity that there would come a time when congregations would be unable to understand Christian services : and so far were they from desiring to keep the people in ignorance that they promoted with all their power the translation of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures into Latin, Syriac, Coptic, and Gothic while these were yet living and spoken languages. When, however, the utterly unforeseen and unexpected came to pass, and Latin was replaced by what must have appeared to the educated man a corrupt jargon, reverence and habitude conspired with less worthy motives to maintain the ancient liturgies and the ancient translations as the vehicles of public worship, and consequently to render this unintelligible to the worshippers. The natural result was a disposition to call in the eye to remedy the failure of the ear, to lay more stress than formerly upon gesture, ceremony, and decoration, and thus to invest liturgy more and more with the character of drama. As observed by the historian of the English drama, just as the ancient plays were divided between the dialogue of the actors and the songs of the chorus, so the liturgy had its epical and lyrical portions ; the former readings from Scripture and showings forth of divine mysteries ; the latter chants and anthems. It was not that dramas were expressly composed for liturgical purposes, but that germs already present in the ritual developed into dramatic representations. At last the religious drama went forth from the Church into the open air as an offshoot of liturgy, a kindred yet independent form of service. By a further important, yet highly natural development, it was allowed to be expressed in the vernacular, not being deemed likely to give birth to heresy or foster a spirit of inquiry. Thus was the drama restored by the very institution which had taken it away, and which would still have denounced it except as the supposed medium of religious edification. The evolutionary process was slow, and is to us obscure, but on the whole it may be concluded that the mystery or miracle play was an accepted institution in Central Europe towards the end of the eleventh century. It does not appear to have taken root in Italy or Spain, in both of which countries it was destined to assume a more cultivated literary form and to develop a higher style of poetry than elsewhere, until the thirteenth century. The earliest known date for a miracle play is in England, where a *Ludus de Sancta Katharina* was acted early in the twelfth century. This may probably have been in Latin. The

vernacular gained ground slowly; and at one time was the language of the inferior characters, while the more exalted personages spoke the learned tongue, an arrangement exactly analogous to the distribution of Sanscrit and Pracrit between the characters of a Hindoo play. So long as French continued to be the Court language in England, royal personages used it on the stage as a token of their dignity. In one of the mystery plays King Herod gravely remarks that he is tired of talking French.

Early writers of miracle plays

Although the religious drama became as much a part of the national life in England as in any other country, it was probably introduced by the Normans, a livelier people and more impressionable by the mimetic art. The earliest religious play preserved, one on the story of Adam, is apparently Norman, and not Anglo-Norman, as supposed at one time. GEOFFREY OF ST. ALBANS, author of the play on the history of St. Katharine, already mentioned as the first example of its class in England, was a native of Maine. He taught a school at Dunstable, and probably wrote the play for representation by his pupils. The performers, whoever they were, were vested in splendid ecclesiastical apparel borrowed from the Abbey of St. Albans. The night after the representation a fire broke out in Geoffrey's house, and all the borrowed vestments perished. Overcome with confusion and remorse, he made what seemed the only possible atonement by entering the abbey as a monk. Ere long he was abbot, but whether the religious drama flourished under his administration we are not told. The next religious dramatist whose name is preserved, HILARIUS, reverses Geoffrey's case; he appears to have been an Englishman, but lived and wrote in France. Three of his plays are preserved, upon a miracle of St. Nicholas, the raising of Lazarus, and the history of Daniel. The language is Latin interspersed with French. The drama continued to make progress in England throughout the twelfth century, and, which was far from being the case in France, the subjects seem to have been almost invariably taken from sacred history or legend. Such is the testimony of William Fitzstephen, the biographer of Becket, who, writing between 1170 and 1180, says: "Instead of theatrical exhibitions, instead of scenic plays, London has plays of a holier kind: to wit, representations of the miracles which the holy confessors worked, or of the sufferings in which the constancy of the martyrs was gloriously confirmed." Fitzstephen had been Becket's intimate friend and confidant, and it is clear from his evidence that the sacred drama was in his time encouraged by the Church. It is remarkable, however, that he seems to speak merely of miracle plays or dramatic exhibitions founded on the legends of martyrs and confessors, and ignores the mystery or Scriptural drama, which was always the most popular in England, and to which almost all extant specimens belong. Whatever the nature of the representations, it would seem a fair inference from Fitzstephen's words that they were public and accessible to all, and not merely private performances within the walls of an abbey or convent. Not long after, about 1220, mention is found of a play on the Resurrection being acted in the churchyard of Beverley Minster.

Two circumstances are now to be mentioned which had the greatest

influence upon the development of the miracle play. One was the institution, decreed in 1264, but not fully effected until 1311, of the festival of Corpus Christi, involving a great procession in the open air. The time fixed for this display, the Thursday after Trinity Sunday, was well adapted for open-air shows and performances: while, from the religious character of the ceremony, the jousts and games which might otherwise have amused the populace were out of place, and the problem was how to combine enjoyment with edification. Nothing could seem fitter for this purpose than the miracle play, which equally met the popular demand for amusement and the ecclesiastical requisite that the entertainments of Corpus Christi should partake of the nature of a religious solemnity. Here the second important circumstance to which we have referred came in, a circumstance as distinctly mediæval as the institution of Corpus Christi itself. The trade guilds, in England at least, came forward to charge themselves with the expense and assume the direction of the representation, and in many cities England had at length a national drama, rude indeed, but appreciated by the people, patronised by the clergy, not wholly slighted by the aristocracy, and preface and presage of the drama to come.

Connection of the trade guilds with dramatic performances

The very name of guild, except with reference to small associations founded for some object of limited scope and usually of more or less of an amateur character, is strange to us at this day. We have to consider all that the Guildhall implies, and to reflect that the great City Companies were once guilds in the strictest sense of the term, ere we can in any measure realise the state of things prevailing when every workman was actually the member of a guild, and bound by the regulations which it pleased this body to enforce. Of the two great classes of guilds which covered England in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the social guild generally existing for the sake of charitable works, and the craft guild or association of workmen and tradesmen, we are here only concerned with the latter. This, with its offshoot the merchants' guild, was a kind of minor corporation, able within limits to organise its members, and levy contributions upon them for any legal purpose. When once the idea had found currency that it beseemed such a body to give a dramatic exhibition for the enhancement of the Corpus Christi solemnity, the future of these entertainments was assured, for the resources of the guilds were extensive, and mutual emulation guaranteed their being exerted to the uttermost. Κεραμεὺς κεραμεῖ κοτέει, καὶ τέκτονι τέκτων. An additional incitement was afforded by the fines levied upon the crafts which failed to give the performance allotted to them, or broke down in the representation. Each guild was entrusted as far as possible with a performance in harmony with the character of its own craft; thus the building of the Ark was represented by the shipwrights. The number of these associations seems startling, until the great subdivision of labour in the Middle Age is considered, and the jealousy lest one craft should encroach on the domain of another. We hear o' bladesmiths, sheathers, buckle-makers, girdelers, corvisors (shoemakers), spicers, fletchers (arrow-makers), pinners, needlers, and whittawers (workers in white leather).

The co-operation of the various guilds rendered it practicable to exhibit

System of dramatic exhibition

one great piece composed of a number of consecutive plays, so arranged as to embrace the entire course of sacred history, each company taking one. The machinery employed carried us back to the days when Thespis and his fellow-performers—if Horace may be believed—perambulated Attica in a cart. It consisted of two movable stages, one the *pageant* (Greek *pegma* or Latin

Representation of a Mystery Play

From a drawing by David Jee in Sharp's "Coventry Mysteries," 1825

pagina—plank) or platform upon which the representation was given, a term now transferred to the show itself; and a scaffold for the spectators. The stage for the performers was in two storeys, in the lower of which they dressed and undressed, while the piece was acted in the upper. The scaffolds, with a slow solemnity worthy of the Trojan Horse or the Car of Juggernaut, passed through the town and paused at places convenient for a concourse of spectators. When the representation was finished, platform and scaffold moved on, and

a new company and a new piece came forward in their place. A stage direction seems to imply that the performance was not strictly confined to the "pageant"; but that King Herod, at least when extra furious, "raged in the street." There could be little attempt at scenery, but details of costume and stage fittings are abundantly supplied by the account books of the municipalities, when these have been preserved, and are full of curiosity and interest. The representation of Paradise naturally surpassed the powers of the scenic artists of that period, but they were perfectly at home in Hell, and especial pains were taken with Hell mouth, delineated as the literal mouth of an enormous monster, and with the pitchforks and clubs of the demons. The latter implements were considerately made of wadding: but the gunpowder which the fiends are enjoined to carry about various parts of their persons, if not mere *brutum fulmen*, in which case it might as well have been omitted, must have been productive of considerable inconvenience to the performer. The whole of this department of the representation is a strange mixture of the terrible and the ludicrous, entirely in the spirit of the grotesque carvings of cathedral corbels; and the semblances of the fiends preserved in some contemporary delineations offer strong affinity to the figures in ancient editions of the *Ars Moriendi*. Elsewhere there is abundant simplicity, but no intentional irreverence; the comic scenes, coarse as they sometimes are, being confined to inferior characters, and kept apart from the main action. Music was not wanting, and some of the few songs which have been preserved possess real grace and lyrical spirit. The following are examples of the songs of shepherds at the Nativity:—

As I outrode this enderes[1] night,
Of three jolly shepherds I saw a sight,
And all about their fold a star shone bright.
They sang terli terlow,
So meryly the shepherds their pipes can blow.

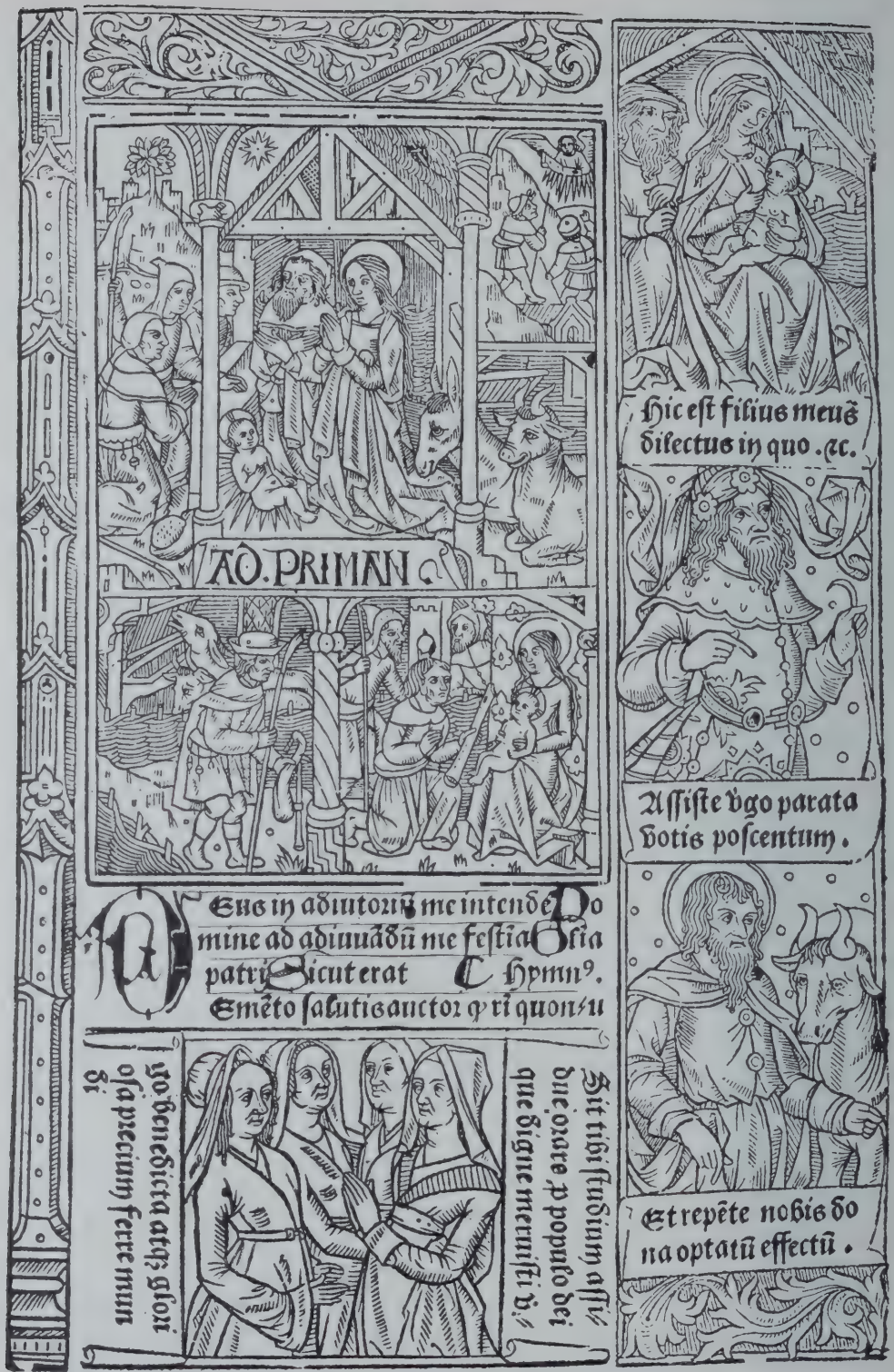
Down from heaven from heaven so high,
Of angels ther came a great company,
With mirth and joy and great solemnity,
They sang terli terlow,
So meryly the shepherds their pipes can blow.

One shepherd offers the infant Saviour his flute, another his hat, another his mittens, in language simple and quaint, but embodying the sentiment, "Take this, O Lord, 'tis all I have to give." In another version a shepherd offers his wife's old stockings, and a lad, foreseeing that the infant Christ will one day have occasion for a nuthook, presents his own:—

To pull down apples, pears and plums.
Old Joseph shall not need to hurt his thumbs.

It is easy to realise how much life and colour the miracle play must have brought into the existence of mediæval society, and to what extent the happy idea of making its representation the business of a particular order of the

[1] Last.


AD. PRIMAN
Hic est filius meus dilectus in quo .&c.
Assiste vgo parata votis poscentum.
Deus in adiutoriū me intende Domine ad adiuuandū me festina Gloria patri Sicut erat Hymn⁹.
Et trepete nobis donata optatū effectū.
Sit tibi fluxum ante deum quod oramus ut pro nobis dignum mereamur fieri
Ob benedicta ac gloriosa preconia ferre munera

Shepherds presenting their Gifts to the Infant Christ

From a "Horæ" printed by Verard, circ. 1490

community must have rendered it a matter of general public interest: with what anxiety Corpus Christi day must have been looked forward to; how bright and brilliant the show must have been under favourable auspices; how grievous the disappointment of bad weather; how free the criticisms of the respective guilds on the doings of their colleagues and rivals; and, in spite of ludicrous blunders and deliberate travesties, how important an educational influence the performances must have been for the unlettered man. How far misrepresentation, innocent or otherwise, could be carried, especially when a farcical element entered into the performance, may be illustrated by a scene in the mystery of Mary Magdalen (a play with much affinity to the morality, and where, though in rhyme, alliteration is systematically employed), where the Emperor Tiberius is exhibited in the act of holding a solemn service for the worship of Mahomet. The heathen priest of "Mahound" (by a singular irony of fortune the inveterate enemy of idolatry was all over Europe taken for an idol himself) is attended by a clerk, and is as particular as any clergyman of the Greek or Latin rite about the correctness of his vestments and the due decoration of his altar:—

Now, my clerke Hawkyn, for love of me,
Loke fast myne awter were arayed.
Goo, ring a bellé two or three;
Lythly, childe, it be not delayd;
For here xall be a grete solemnyté;
Loke, boy, thou do it with a brayd.[1]

The boy misbehaves himself, and is beaten, but upon being taken into favour again, is thus addressed by his master:

Now, boy, to my awter I wyll me dresse,
On xall my westment and myn aray.
Boy. Nor than the lesse wyll I expresse
Lyke as lengyth for the service of this day.

Leccio mahoundys, viri fortissimi saracenorum

Glabriosum ad glumendum glumandinorum:

with three more lines of gibberish followed by a free translation, ending:

Grant you grace to dye on the galowes.

This recalls Bruce's benediction (in English) to the Abyssinian monks, "Lord send you all a halter, as he did to the Acab Saat," a turbulent ecclesiastic who had been hanged some time previously. "To which they, thinking that I was recommending them to the prayers of the departed patriarch, devoutly responded, Amen! so be it!"

Another source of misrepresentation in the religious drama was the necessity for adapting it in some respects to the comprehension of the ignorant. "As," remarks Mr. Courthope, "many of the spectators would not have understood the term 'high priest,' Annas and Caiaphas are called 'bishops.' When Pilate is first approached by the leaders of the Jews he tells

[1] Loud noise.

them they must bring their cause before him 'in parliament.' In order to obtain a place for setting up the cross, negotiations have to be entered into with a 'squire,' who gives a lease of Calvary, but is cheated in the transaction."

Authorship of the religious dramas

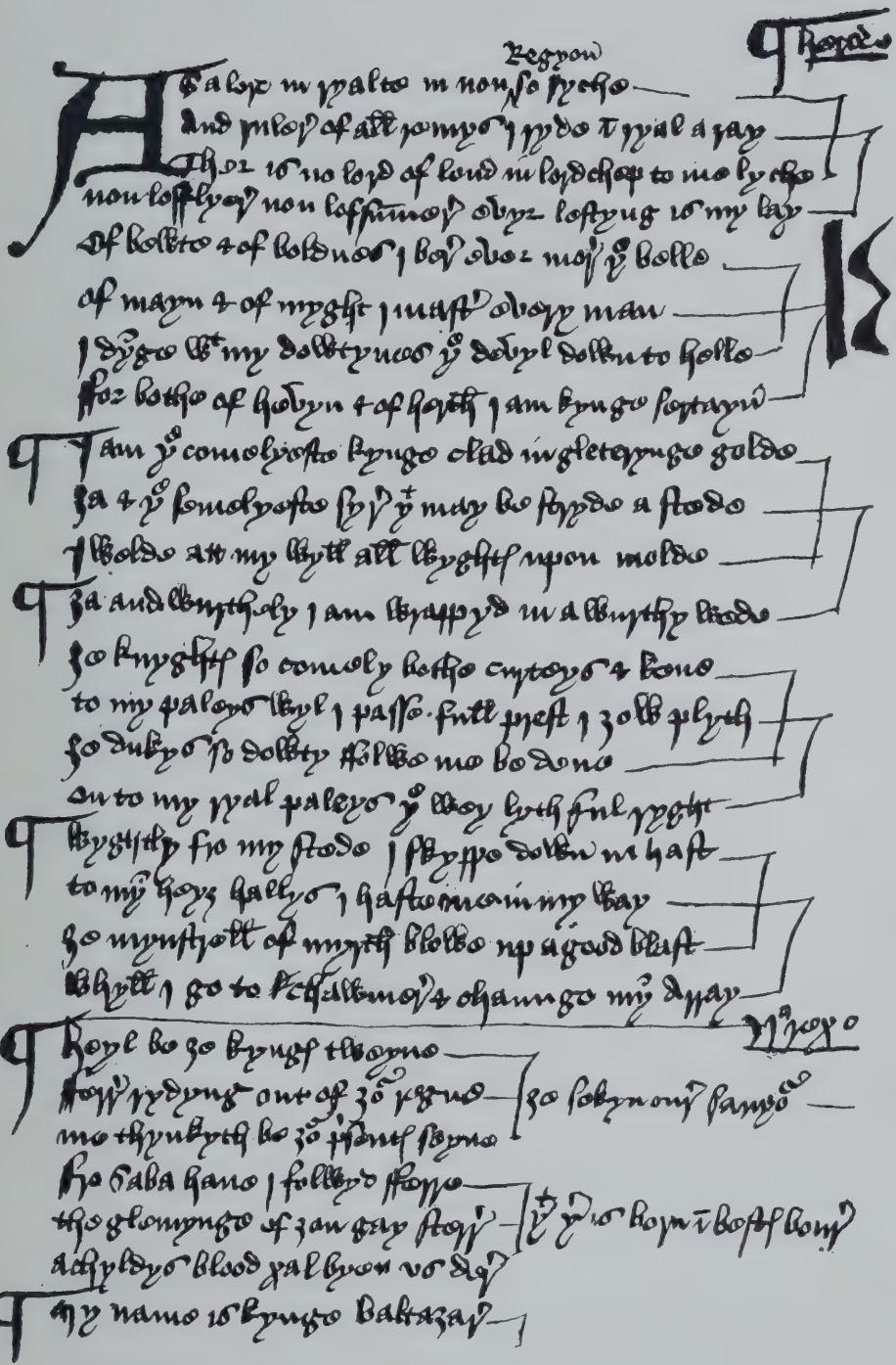
Of the authors of these plays little is known. The difficulty which they evidently experience in accommodating their matter to the restraints of metre and rhyme, which occasionally renders them very obscure, seems to show that they were not practised writers, and the dogmatic purpose and unity of plan apparent in the York mysteries in particular would almost justify the attribution of most of them to a single author, who may have been either a layman or a cleric. The freedom of some might seem to exclude clerical authorship, but the manners of the age and the intimate association of clergy and laity must be taken into account. Many of the pieces which have come down to us as performed at different places may have been derived from some common source, now lost. At a very late period we encounter a hired professional poet, John Green, who is paid by the men of Coventry five shillings for his play, exactly the amount awarded to the trumpeter.

From "The Harrying of Hell"

British Museum Arundel MS.

Early Mysteries

Perhaps the oldest example of an English mystery that has come down to us is *The Harrying of Hell*, founded on perhaps the only Christian legend which it is safe to ascribe to a Buddhist origin. Though a rhymed dialogue this is scarcely a dramatic piece, and would hardly have borne acting. It is simply a dispute between Christ and Satan, in the course of which Satan is



From "The Play of the Three Kings"—Coventry Mysteries

British Museum MS. Vesp. D. VIII.

informed that he has thrown *ames ace*, and which terminates by the Saviour's triumph and return from Hades with the ransomed souls of the patriarchs of the old dispensation. The so-called Digby Mysteries include the drama on Mary Magdalen already mentioned.

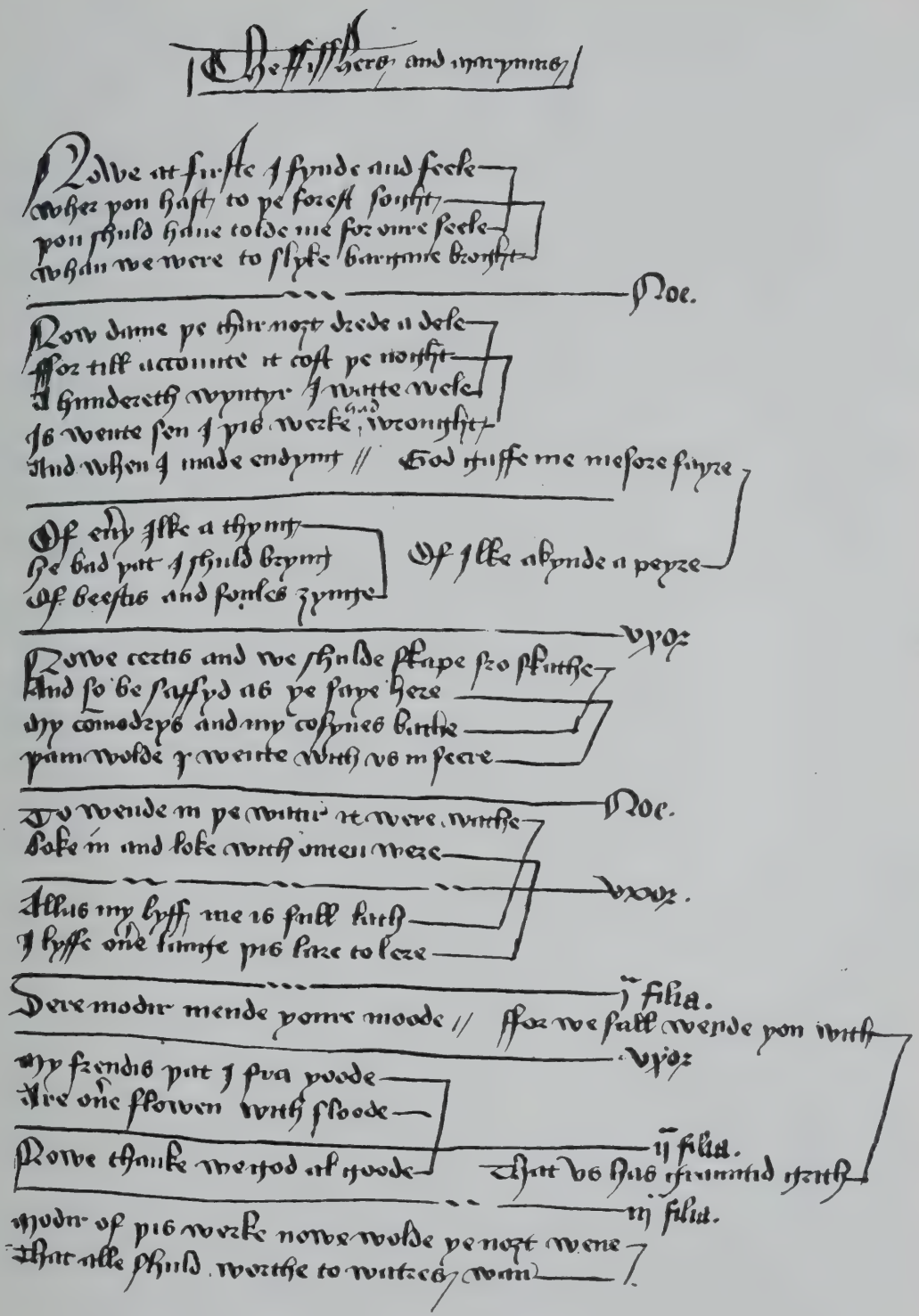
There are four series of mystery plays composed for consecutive representation at Corpus Christi or some other high festival: the Chester, the York, the Townley, and the Coventry. A fifth, the Beverley, only known from the records of the town, is lost, but may have been merely another version of the York. Other towns probably had their sets of performances, which perhaps they borrowed from their neighbours. There are several notices of performances of separate plays at Lincoln and other places.

The Chester Mysteries

The Chester Mysteries may probably be the oldest now in existence, but there is some doubt as to their history. In a note upon a manuscript, backed by a local tradition, but both too recent to carry much weight, they are said to have been written by a priest named Randal Higgenet, who seems an apocryphal personage, under the mayoralty of Sir John Arneway, 1327–28. Arneway was, however, in fact mayor from 1268 to 1276, and his name seems to be an error for Richard Ernes. It is nevertheless possible that plays of earlier date were incorporated into a series prepared for continuous representation by the guilds about 1328. It speaks for the antiquity of such representations at Chester that these were there held not on Corpus Christi as usual but at Whitsuntide, as though the performance dated from an earlier period than the institution in 1311. There are twenty-five plays in all, some, such as that on the history of Balaam and his ass, upon subjects not treated elsewhere. The performances continued to the end of the sixteenth century, and were witnessed in 1594 by Archdeacon Rogers, whose account is one of our most reliable sources of information respecting the mechanical conduct of the show. He says that nine plays were performed on the Monday, nine on the Tuesday, and seven on the Wednesday. None were of any great length.

The York Mysteries

The York series of Mysteries is one of the most valuable of any, and the most extensive, including forty-eight pieces. The manuscript from which it is derived originally belonged to the Corporation of York, and hence has an official character. It remained in the custody of the Corporation until 1579, when it was submitted to Archbishop Sandys for correction, and his Grace locked it up. It has been most ably edited by Miss Lucy Toulmin Smith, who dates it about 1440, but the plays are probably a full century earlier. The first mention of performances at York is in 1378; and in 1415 Roger Burton, city clerk, compiled a catalogue of the performances then habitual and of the guilds by which they were produced. The dramatic taste was strong at York, and plays independent of the guilds were occasionally performed, among others one on the Lord's Prayer, alluded to by Wycliffe. The course of the representations is the same as elsewhere, being a series of scenes comprehending all the most dramatic incidents of Scripture history from the Creation to the Day of Judgment.



The Shepherds and Noah

Wolve att firste I fynde and seeke
whether yon hasty to ye forest soughte
yon shuld hame tolde me for owre seeke
whan we were to slyke bargayne brought

Noe.

Now dame ye thinr nogt drede ii dele
for till accounte it cost ye noghte
I thinder eth wynter I watte wele
is wente sen I pis werke wrought
and when I made endyng // god thanke me nefore fayre

Of ewy ilke a thyng
he bad put I shuld bryng
of beestis and foules fyne
of ilke abynde a peyre

vxor.

Wolve certis and we shulde shape so shrithe
and so be sayd as ye saye here
thy comedeys and my cosynes blithe
pam wolde I weente with vs to feere

Noe.

To wende in ye watir it were wirshe
loke in and loke with ones were

vxor.

Allas my lyff me is full lathe
I lyke one limfe pis lare to lere

1 filia.

Dere modir mende youre moode // for we shall wende yon with

vxor.

my frendis put I fra woode
are one flowen with floode

ii filia.

Nowe thanke we god all goode that vs has thrimmid thrith

iii filia.

thoder of pis werke nowe wolde ye nogt were
that alle shuld worthe to watires wam

From the York Mysteries

British Museum Add. MSS. 35,290

The Townley Mysteries

The Townley series of Mysteries differs from the rest, not in plan or structure, but in being partly the composition of a true though unknown poet, one endowed with remarkable gifts both of humour and of tragic expression, and under no restraint in making use of either. His work, which embraces a fourth of the collection, is known by the peculiarity of the nine-line stanza employed by him. The spirit of his work is intensely mediæval, whether in his ghastly and almost revolting pictures of pain and woe; or in the broad farce of his comic interludes, whose buffoonery was then quite compatible with reverence. Such descriptions as those of the tortures of the Saviour in the Mystery of the Passion, or of corruption in the grave in the *Lazarus*, are terrifying in their naked realism; while nothing can be more comical than the deportment of the knavish shepherd who robs his honest colleagues of a sheep, and tries to pass it off as his own child in its cradle. Four of the Townley Mysteries are nearly identical with others in the York series. They take their name from being found in a MS. formerly belonging to Colonel Townley, the donor of the Townley marbles to the British Museum, but are sometimes called the "Woodkirk" from an erroneous belief that they were written at Woodkirk, a dependency of the monastery of St. Oswald at Nostel, near Wakefield, in which town they seem to have been represented. They number thirty-one. From an allusion to some peculiarities of female costume introduced by Richard II.'s Queen, Anne of Bohemia, one at least appears to have been composed after her nuptials; the others seen to be of about the same period, and the most probable date is the reign of Henry IV.

The Coventry Mysteries, or *Ludus Coventriæ*, comprise forty-two pieces. A manuscript note of late date states them to have been connected with the Grey Friars of Coventry. It has been doubted, however, whether they were not the production of itinerants, and acted in different parts of the country.

Popularity of the miracle play

The miracle play deserves much praise as a thoroughly healthy and natural outgrowth of its age, constituting a really popular drama. The writers on the whole held the middle way between the stage and the pulpit very successfully; without losing sight of the religious instruction, which was the *rationale* of their existence, they kept the attention of the spectators fully alive. This was no doubt in great measure owing to their close alliance with the guilds, who knew well what the public required, and to the careful organisation which provided for the rapid succession of performances. At the same time this mechanical procedure discouraged originality; every piece was a stock piece; when the repertory was once complete, no novelties were wanted; there was no more demand for a new Noah or Abraham than for a new Punch and Judy. The religious drama, therefore, was incapable of development, and its principal literary service was to keep the love of the drama alive in the hearts of the people, ready to create a new theatre when it should itself have become obsolete. Though little connection can be traced between it and the theatre of Shakespeare, it was the latter's precursor, and in this point of view claims a more important place in our literary history than the merely academical and classical play.

Humorous and other embellishments

Scripture history is sufficiently extensive to supply the mediæval dramatist with a multitude of personages, but he would not have been permitted, even had he possessed the ability, to deviate from the traditional estimate of his characters. He must not speculate on the motives of Judas, or seek to place himself at Pharaoh's point of view. His invention, therefore, is chiefly shown in the introduction or expansion of subordinate characters. There is no dramatic necessity, for example, for a conversation between the men who are fastening Christ to the cross, but the dramatist seizes the opportunity of manifesting his rude strength and realistic power. Comic divergences from the sacred text are more frequent. All the versions of the Ark story get infinite fun out of Noah's wife, of whom Genesis records nothing remarkable, but who is here exhibited as a consummate vixen. The good lady really stands on a higher moral plane than her husband, for she objects to survive her friends, whose fate is to him a matter of indifference. But if right in substance she is grievously incorrect in form, and her shrewishness and Noah's distraction must have provoked peals of laughter. It is curious to find a similar antediluvian comic element in a Portuguese *auto* performed as late as 1780. Noah, being about to build the ark, sends his servant to engage a carpenter, when a discussion arises about payment. The carpenter is ready to take Noah's note of hand; but his wife, the counterpart of Mrs. Noah, insists on money down: she must pay her debts before she is drowned, she says.[1] Another source of the comic is the bombast of Herod, who seems a combination of Herod the Great with Herod Agrippa, "whose voice was the voice of a god and not of a man," and whose claims to universal supremacy might almost be taken for an oblique satire upon the Pope's:

I am King of all mankynde,
I bid, I beat, I loose, I bynde,
I maister the moon, take this in mynde,
  That I am most of might.
I am the greatest above degree,
That is, that was, that ever shall be:
The sonne it dare not shine on me,
  As I bid him go downe.
No rain to fall shall now be free;
Nor no lord have that liberty,
That dare abide, and I bid flee,
  But I shall crack his crowne.

Rants like this, and not Herod's iniquities, originated the proverbial phrase, "out-Heroding Herod."

Occasional tenderness and

Passages of real tenderness and pathos are not infrequent. The play of the Shepherds has been mentioned in this respect, and the sacrifice of Isaac is very touching. One of the prettiest situations is that of the venerable Simeon, divided between his hopes and his doubts as he strives to rationalise the prediction of Isaiah:—

[1] In fact, the comic female of whom Noah's wife is an instance is older than Noah himself, and may be traced back to the earliest legends of savages, such as the Uganda tradition, for example, representing the Creator's work as marred by the perverse obstinacy of woman.

A Lorde, muche is thy power!
A wonder find I written here,
It saythe a maiden fair and clear
Shall conceive and bear
A sonne called Emanuel.
But of this leeve[1] I never a del.[2]
It is wrong written, as I have hede,
Or elles wonder were.
He that wrote this was a fone[3]
To write a virgin hereupon,
That should conceive without help of man;
This writing marvels me.
I will scrape it away anon.
There as a virgin is written in,
I will write, a good woman
For so it should be.

ANNA VIDUA.

Simeon, father, sooth I see
That Christ shall come our boot to be
From the Father in majestie
On mankynde for to mynne.[4]
And when he cometh, leve[5] thou me,
He will have mercye and pittie
On his folk to make them free,
And save them of their synne.

Simeon refers again to the scroll with which he has tampered:

O Lorde, how may this be to-day
That I wrote last I find away,
And of red letters in stout array
A Virgin written thereon.
Nay, hereafter, I will assay
Whether this miracle be vereye
And scrape this word written so gaye,
And write, a good woman.

When he next consults the scroll he finds Virgin restored in letters of gold, and he surrenders.

Acme and decline of the religious drama

The fifteenth century may be regarded as the golden age of the miracle play in England. Retaining their democratic organisation, the festivals were nevertheless patronised by persons of rank, and the general appreciation endured well into the sixteenth century. The spread of culture must in process of time have destroyed entertainments of such essential and irremediable *naïveté*, as has happened even in Roman Catholic countries except in such isolated instances as the Ober Ammergau Passion Play (a most remarkable counterpart to the Persian dramatic representations which still annually take place at Kerbela in commemoration of the martyrdom of Ali) and the similar performances which even now linger in Catalonia. The Reformation accelerated the decay of the religious drama, partly from the incompatibility of its doctrines with the veneration of saints and other features of the old

[1] Believe. [2] Bit. [3] Fond, foolish. [4] Think. [5] Believe.

miracle play, but still more from the general mutation of the religious atmosphere. Religion had become a matter of more serious concern than of old, and the familiarity of treatment inseparable from the miracle play now appeared indecorous, even offensive. On the other side was to be set the love of shows innate in the human breast, which led the people of York in Elizabeth's time to petition that the representations might be continued. But the dean, Matthew Hutton, afterwards archbishop, deemed that this could not be; nor, considering the strength of the Roman Catholic reaction, could he well have judged otherwise. The men of Coventry fought hard for their "Hox Tuesday" (Hock Tide is the week following Easter) and their entertainment was alternately "laid down" and temporarily revived. They tried to meet the changed circumstances of the times by the compromise of a play on the Destruction of Jerusalem, with which none but a Jew could find fault; and by another on a subject of national interest, "The Destruction of the Danes," perhaps with an oblique reference to the Spaniards. But this would not answer, and when we find that the mounting of the plays, instead of being as formerly the spontaneous undertaking of the citizens, was let out to a contractor, we must acknowledge that the institution had lived its appointed time. The Elizabethan drama came in for the entertainment of the better classes of society; the inferior, it is to be feared, were thrown back upon brutal sports, such as bull and bear-baiting, of which for a long time to come we hear more than we were wont to hear in the middle ages, though they were by no means unknown to Fitzstephen in the twelfth century.

The Morality

As already intimated, the morality was a later development than the mystery or miracle play. It took its rise from the introduction of allegorical personages into the latter, and, the innovation proving popular, plays came to be written in which the personages were entirely allegorical. In the hands of a great poet like Calderon, this form rose to a great elevation of poetry; and although England produced no Calderon, and the abstractions of the morality could not vie in human interest with the realities set forth in the Scriptural or miracle play, the new form nevertheless promoted dramatic art by compelling the playwright to depend upon his own powers of invention both for character and plot. The morality endured to so late a period that Shakespeare writes of one of its stock characters, "the Vice," as an impersonation existing in his day. One of the oldest, and perhaps the most interesting of the genuine mediæval moralities is *The Castle of Perseverance*, where Mankind is represented as hesitating between the admonition of his good and the allurements of his evil angel, yielding to the latter, repenting, standing like Piers Plowman a siege in the Castle of Perseverance, garrisoned by all the Christian Virtues, apostatising again, but ultimately delivered by free grace. The following is a specimen of the poetry, which is not devoid of lyrical spirit:

THE BAD ANGEL.

Cum on, man, wherefore hast thou care?
Go we to the werld, I rede thee, blyve.[1]
For then thou shalt soon ryght well fare,
In case if thou thynke for to thryve.
No lord schal thee be lycke.
Take the werld to thine entent,
And let thy love be thereon lent
With gold and silver and rich rent.
Anon shalt thou be riche.

HUMANUM GENUS.

Now syth thou hast behetyn[2] me so,
I will go with thee and essay.
I ne lette for friend nor foe,
But with the werld I will go play
Certes a little throw.
In this werld is all my trust,
To lyve in lykynge and in lust:
Have he and I onys[3] cust,[4]
We shall not part, I trowe.

THE GOOD ANGEL.

A! nay, man! for Christes blod!
Cum again by street and stile!
The werld is wicked and full wod,[5]
And thou shalt levyn but a while,
What covetest thou to win?
Man, think on thine ending day,
When thou shalt be closed under clay,
And if thou think of that array
Certes thou shalt not synne.

Other examples of the morality, such as *Everyman*, *Hicke Scorner*, are outside the limits of the mediæval period, and will be more conveniently noticed with the poetry of the age to which they belong.

Place of the miracle play in dramatic history

The miracle play, as will have been perceived, owed nothing to literature, and in return literature owes nothing to it. It did not depend for its acceptance upon literary qualities, but partly upon religious sanctions, partly upon the brightness and colour which its occasional representation brought into homely lives, partly upon its gratification of the mimetic instinct common to the majority of mankind. In many parts of Europe guilds and confraternities still walk in procession on Corpus Christi Day, and in Italy, says Mr. Pollard, "little children toddle among them, dressed, some with a tiny sheepskin and staff to represent St. John the Baptist; others in sackcloth as St. Mary Magdalene; others in a blue robe with a little crown, as the Blessed Virgin; others again with an aureole tied to their little heads, as the infant Saviour." It allied piety with entertainment much in the fashion of a modern oratorio; but while the enjoyment of the latter presupposes a certain amount of culture and a certain

[1] Quickly. [2] Ordered. [3] Once. [4] Kissed. [5] Mad.

amount of money, the miracle play was comprehensible by the least educated, and accessible to the humblest. Regarded merely as literature, its pretensions and its performances alike are insignificant. In but one country of Europe was it able to rise to the dignity of poetry, and that chiefly in the department of moralities, where personified virtues and vices afforded more ample field for dramatic invention and poetical embellishment than the conventional and stereotyped figures of Scriptural characters and saints. An unusually fortunate conflux of circumstances, the coincidence in a corner of Europe of a great age of dramatic literature with an exalted condition of religious feeling, made the Spanish sacramental Auto in Calderon's hands a permanent addition to letters, though one incapable either of development or revival. Elsewhere it remained sterile, in so far as visible addition to literature was concerned, but indirectly its effects were highly important. It preserved a conception of the drama in the minds of humble people throughout rude ages, it expanded their views and helped them to realise bygone times and distant regions of the world. It is interesting, for example, to find "drombodaryes" provided for the journey of the Three Kings of the East, with the announcement that they will cover a hundred miles a day. If the actual contribution to the stock of knowledge was small, the stimulus afforded to curiosity was great. The peculiar system of its production seemed admirably though unintentionally adapted to make it a theme of living interest to large bodies of men. Each guild had its own piece; every craftsman participated more or less in its production, esteemed its success a personal satisfaction, and scrutinised the performance of his competitors with the interest not merely of a spectator but of a rival. The mere text was the least part; costume, rehearsal, and representation conspired to keep a considerable portion of the community for a time in an ideal world. Hence a taste for the drama was kept alive which, when the performance of the miracle play was checked by the Reformation, reacted in another direction, and became the nutriment of the popular drama which might otherwise, as in Italy, have remained the amusement of courts and polite society. The good burghers of York, whom we have seen chafing at Dean Hutton's inevitable decision that the miracle play must be performed there no more, were in the best possible frame of mind to form the audience of a Shakespeare. Nor is it, perhaps, entirely an accident that Shakespeare himself came from the neighbourhood of one of its principal seats, the good town of Coventry, where it was occasionally performed even in his own day; where a dramatic tradition of some sort must have existed; which contributed players to the splendid festivals at Kenilworth Castle; where, in after years, Sarah Kemble became Sarah Siddons; and which witnessed the birth of Ellen Terry.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

THE necessity for treating the poetry of Lydgate along with the poetry of Gower, and for offering a connected view of the English religious drama throughout the entire period of its existence, has compelled us to infringe strict chronological order, and trench largely upon the not too opulent literature of the fifteenth century. No opportunity, however, has as yet presented itself for a general survey of a period by no means devoid of interesting features, although, paradoxical as this may seem, one of the most memorable is its barrenness.

Invention of printing in the fifteenth century

By a single achievement the fifteenth century rendered greater service to literature than any previous age had performed, or than any future age can hope to rival. This, obviously, is the invention of printing; of all the one requiring the least genius in the inventor. Nothing can be more humiliating to the pride of human intellect than to observe the tardiness of mankind in making so simple a discovery; how Greeks and Romans and Saracens stumbled on the brink of it without ever stumbling upon it; how the Chinese actually did make it without turning it to account (as it does not seem to have exerted the least influence upon Chinese literature); how mediæval Europe remained in utter ignorance of the Chinese feat, and was at last led to printing by the path of wood-engraving. The discovery, then, is no special credit to the intelligence of the fifteenth century; although, like the other marvel of the age, the discovery of America, which ought to have been made long before, it is a reproach to the intelligence of preceding generations. While ever grateful to the age for two such performances, we cannot allow that they contribute much to redeem it from that sterility of original genius which, until we approach its close, is its most distinguishing characteristic.

General intellectual sterility of the age

This would not have been anticipated by one qualified to take a comprehensive view of the situation at the end of the preceding epoch. The fourteenth century had not merely produced great writers, but writers who had accomplished not only great but novel things, and who seemed to have launched literature upon new paths of excellence. Petrarch in his lyric poetry, indeed, had left no room for a successor; but his epistles and philosophical treatises opened up long vistas. Boccaccio might well have founded a school of

novelists, and both his epical poetry and Chaucer's invited imitation; while the latter poet had shown what an immense and unused field lay open for the delineator of popular manners. Froissart had indicated one equally rich in the delineation of courts and camps on the familiar side; and Villani had made an excellent beginning in regular historical narrative. Yet it was long ere any of these men had a successor to be named in the same breath with

A Scholar's Room in the Fifteenth Century

From a MS. in the Royal Library at Brussels

him. The one world-famous book of the succeeding age, the *Imitation of Christ*, is the work of a mystic independent of Time, and might have been written in any century of the Christian era. The only two other writers with any claim to genius, the authors of *Amadis of Gaul* and of the *Morte d'Arthur*, revert to the ideals of former ages, which Chaucer had derided as obsolete. If they are at all influenced by Boccaccio it is by his early romances, in no respect by the momentous new departure which he had taken in the *Decameron*. The ideal of the fifteenth century is not literature but scholarship.

Far more than the eighteenth does it deserve the reproach of an unimaginative age; far more than the nineteenth of an utilitarian one. Many causes, all efficient to a certain extent, might be assigned for this paralysis of creative power; but the principal is without doubt that the superior minds of the age found themselves in the position of disciples. The mediæval ideals had attained their highest development, and, had there been no Black Death and no Great Schism, must still have passed away. It is impossible to say what would have resulted had there not been a force in the background ready to take their place.

Study of classical literature

For a century past classical antiquity had been slowly rising from its grave, and about the beginning of the fifteenth century presented itself as qualified to fill the gap in men's affections and imaginations created by the decay of the feudal, chivalric, and ecclesiastical ideals. This, in the domains of literature and art, it could only achieve if its superiority to the past were admitted, and to admit this was to convert those who might otherwise have been masters into pupils and disciples. In the department of art this was of little practical moment, for although the theory of art might be revolutionised by the application of new principles, few ancient works were extant to discourage the artist by the constant sentiment of inferiority. He felt, on the other hand, inspirited by his obvious progress beyond the only works of painting and sculpture with which he could compare his own. It was far otherwise with the author who had the masterpieces of antiquity before him, and who must fail equally whether he attempted or renounced the impossible task of excelling them. It cannot be a subject of wonder, then, that originality should depart from literature until the antique spirit, entering and interpenetrating the mediæval world, should have produced something different from either. The literary heroes of this transition period were not men of genius, for genius was temporarily extinct, but the editors, commentators, grammarians, and archæologists, whose business it was to bring the newfound treasure to light, and make it available for the entire educated community. The period of their predominance, which might be roughly identified with the century and a half intervening between the commencement of the Great Schism and the sack of Rome, is rightly called the Renaissance, and the men themselves are comprehended under the denomination of Humanists.

Decline of originality

That, nevertheless, the pursuit of classical studies, although an important, was not the sole cause of the age's deficiency in creative power, appears from the instance of England, where although the progress of humanism was slow, the intellectual sterility was as great as elsewhere. Chaucer's successors, as we have seen, though his enthusiastic disciples, could make little or nothing of the heritage which he had bequeathed to them, and no new ground was broken in any quarter. Something, no doubt, is to be ascribed to the ecclesiastical bigotry of the Lancastrian kings, and their repression of the biblical study and free religious inquiry which were at the time above all things congenial to the national spirit. But this explanation, though true as far as it goes, does not take us very far. From some unknown cause a universal blight had fallen upon the highest faculties of the human intellect, and the

only remedy was that adopted by the humanists, to imbibe the spirit of antiquity, and expect the things that should come. It is true that to these excellent persons the knowledge of antiquity appeared an end sufficient in itself without ulterior purpose, but this conviction was indispensable if the study was to be pursued with the energy necessary to render it fruitful. "What I am doing," says Emerson, "may not be the most important thing in the world; but I must deem it to be so, or I shall not do it with impunity."

The physical and mental insularity of England were natural obstacles to her receipt of the humanistic impulse which was transforming Italy. When, nevertheless, we consider Chaucer's visits to Italy in the preceding century, his vast obligations to Boccaccio, and the manifest influence of Petrarch and even Dante upon his writings, we cannot but feel surprise at the fewness and slightness of traces of Italy in England until far on in the fifteenth century. The national character and capacity had assuredly sunk to a lower level. In some measure, as already observed, this may be due to the discouragement of Bible reading and religious inquiry in general; but this, if partly a cause, was also in a great degree an effect. It may not be an unreasonable conjecture that the Black Death of the middle of the fourteenth century, sparing neither youth nor age, had extinguished the most gifted minds in infancy, and prevented others from coming into being. Certain it is that, during the first half of the fifteenth century, everything in England outside the royal family is mediocrity. Henry V. is a great and heroic figure, but the ideal of a mediæval sovereign rather than of one of his own day. His brother Bedford, who would have made an excellent king, was doomed to waste his powers in a dreary and hopeless contest with France.

Henry V.

After the portrait in the National Portrait Gallery

Paucity of men of genius

The third brother, Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, neither able nor exemplary nor fortunate in public affairs, nevertheless claims distinction as

Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester

the patron of art and letters, as the stay of the fallen and impoverished University of Oxford, and as the one man who saw what Italian culture could effect for England. He did everything in his power to bring the two countries into literary connection, inviting Italians over to instruct Englishmen in classical learning, and corresponding with the more distinguished scholars who could not be induced to leave their own country. He gave Leonardo Bruni the impulse to his translation of Aristotle's *Politics*, and, at the suggestion of the Archbishop of Milan, enabled Pier Candido Decembrio to complete the translation of Plato's *Republic*, and accepted the dedication of the work. He had been partly educated at Balliol College, and patriotically came to the rescue of Oxford, then in a lamentable condition, generally ascribed to the foreign wars, but which it is difficult to avoid connecting with the violent suppression of freedom of thought and by consequence of freedom of study in Wycliffe's day. Emulating Richard de Bury,

Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester

From the "Catalogus Librorum Manuscriptorum Anglicæ et Hiberniæ," 1697

Bishop of Durham, and author of the *Philobiblon*, who in the preceding century had founded a library at Oxford, he gave so many books that the University had to build a special repository for them, to which he contributed, and he would have anticipated the fame of Sir Thomas Bodley but for the scandalous plundering of his library under Edward VI. His patronage of letters, apart from his direct connection with translation and his munificence to Oxford, is thus described by Bishop Creighton :

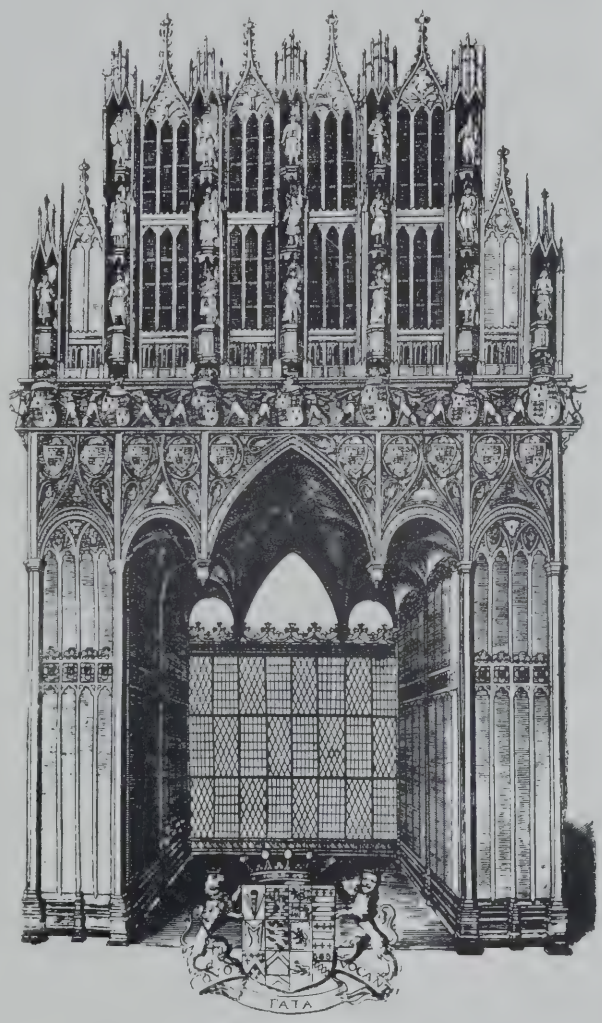
> "He encouraged the writings of such treatises as the age enjoyed, discussions of questions of no particular meaning for the sake of gathering round them a certain amount of recondite knowledge, of exercising dialectical skill and exhibiting the beauty of a classical style. The subjects resemble those which virtuous schoolboys might presumably choose if they were left to select topics for essays, *e.g.*, the difference between virtues and vices, or a comparison of the life of a student with that of a warrior. Besides receiving such compositions from others Humphrey was himself a letter-writer, and sent presents of books to other princes, with appropriate remarks on the fitness of the work for the character of its recipient. Further, he welcomed to England an unknown Italian, who took the high-sounding name of Titus Livius, and constituted himself the biographer of Henry V. Nor did Humphrey neglect English writers ; he befriended Pecock, Capgrave, and Lydgate.

I do not see that he omitted anything which became one who formed himself on the best Italian model."

The Duke also formed around himself a small circle of English humanists, the most remarkable of whom was Bekynton, Bishop of Bath and Wells, and celebrated as one of the chief benefactors to his cathedral and to the city.

English humanists in Italy

The seed sown by Gloucester bore fruit, not in any direct addition to English literature, but in the awakening of humanistic interests among men of intellectual promise in the succeeding generation. Among these were a bishop and an earl, both leading statesmen in their day. William Grey, afterwards Bishop of Ely and Lord High Treasurer, proceeded to Italy about 1442, and remained at least twelve years in the country, studying under the celebrated Guarinus at Ferrara, and, as his ample means allowed, causing manuscripts to be copied in the most elegant calligraphic style for transportation to England. The beautiful illumination of these books invited plunder and mutilation in the sixteenth century; upwards of a hundred and fifty of Grey's manuscripts, nevertheless, remain at Balliol College. As a pioneer, he attracted to Italy other Oxford men, Robert Fleming, Dean of Lincoln, John Free, John Gunthorp, afterwards Dean of Wells; above all, John Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester, a perfect image of the Italian despot of those days for the combination of lettered tastes with ruthless cruelty, which brought him to the scaffold. The English students gained the esteem and admiration of their Italian preceptors; most of the ecclesiastics among them owed their promotion to the Popes; and Ludovicus Carbo, in his funeral oration on Guarinus, enumerates it among his master's merits to have attracted so many



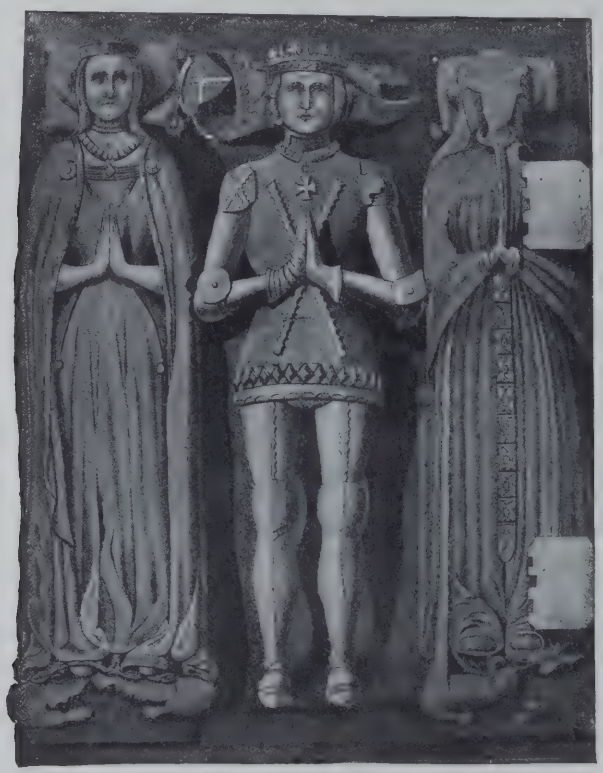
Tomb of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester

From Sandford's "Genealogical History," 1707

Englishmen; and says of Tiptoft in particular that he has despoiled the Italian libraries of manuscripts, and sought to bereave Italy of a yet more precious treasure in the orator himself, whom he has invited to England, "and I certainly will go if you people of Ferrara do not make as much of me as you ought." Here, perhaps, we find the rudiments of "the grand tour," so necessary an item in the higher class English education of the eighteenth century.

Some books and writers of mark

The pilgrims to the land of culture were in one point of view the most interesting men of their prosaic age, and perhaps, together no doubt with some like-minded whose names have not reached us, almost the only ones who possessed an intellectual ideal. They made, however, no addition to English literature, whose utter barrenness was meanwhile being diversified by two very dissimilar kinds of people, an old knight broken in the wars; and a bevy of knights, dames, squires, stewards and retainers who wrote industriously upon their private affairs without any notion that they were contributing to their country's literature. The Paston Letters, nevertheless, afford a view of mediæval domestic life which has never been preserved anywhere but in our England; and in Sir THOMAS MALORY England found such a prose writer as she had never known till then. Before coming to these signal performances it will be desirable to eliminate the three other authors, all men of mark apart from their books, who contributed to prevent the entire extinction of literature. None wrote with a literary purpose, but each did something which would have gained him credit even in a lettered age. They are Bishop REGINALD PECOCK, JOHN CAPGRAVE, and Sir JOHN FORTESCUE. Pecock is the only conspicuous theologian of his epoch, Capgrave its only vernacular historian, Fortescue its sole jurist. Poetry, except for an occasional song or ballad or a metrical version of a religious legend, may be pronounced extinct south of the Tweed, unless *The Flower and the*



John Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester, and his two wives

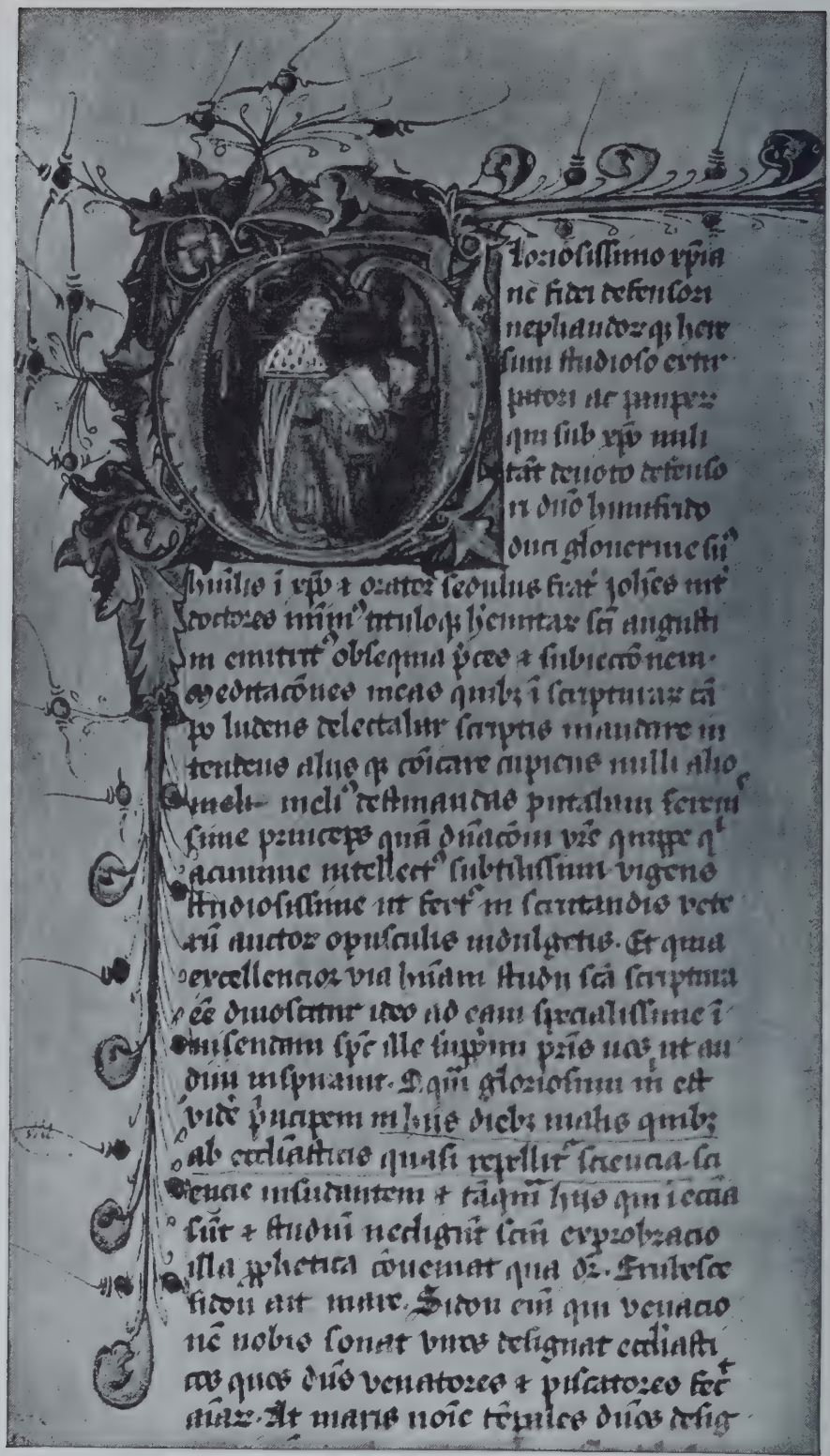
From the monument in Ely Cathedral

Leaf is a work of this age. Imaginative literature of any kind would appear equally lifeless but for the great name of Malory. The extant miracle plays, indeed, mostly belong to the fifteenth century, but even this is a token of the prevalent utilitarianism. They needed to be purveyed, or they would not have been written at all. This utilitarian spirit, nevertheless, is not peculiar to England, but is a note of the whole contemporary literature of Europe, except, perhaps, Scotland. Scarcely anything was published anywhere without reference to some material end, a definition which comprehends divinity and the study of the classics. And, until the invention of printing came to stimulate authorship by rendering publication so much easier, very little was published at all. Yet, as the Paston Letters are about to show us, general education of the kind requisite for the transaction of the ordinary affairs of life stood at a high level : and public documents were composed with an attention to cogency and elegance previously unknown.

Bishop Reginald Pecock

Reginald Pecock (1394–1460), a Welshman by birth, and successively Bishop of St. Asaph and Chichester, is remarkable for his misfortunes, and as the only English prelate of his period, or indeed for long before or afterwards, who betrayed the slightest propensity to knowing more than was good for him. Unquestionably his example was little calculated to encourage similar aberrations among his brethren. His history bears a singular resemblance to Bishop Colenso's. Colenso was led to modify his theological opinions through the reflections forced upon his mind as he endeavoured to convert a Zulu. Pecock fell into what the other bishops thought heresy through his attempts to reclaim the Lollards. He did not, indeed, become a Lollard any more than Colenso became a Zulu ; but he was led to rationalise upon the grounds of moral obligation in a manner agreeable to the nearly unanimous opinion of philosophers, but exceedingly distasteful to the divines of his age. He disparaged or at least minimised the authority of the Church in comparison with that of Scripture, and criticised sundry clauses in the Apostles' Creed. The result was a prosecution for heresy, entailing his recantation, his resignation of his see, and imprisonment for life in Thorney Abbey, soon terminated by his death. He probably had no intention of favouring heresy, but the bent of his mind was evident to his episcopal colleagues. It was rather his habitual cast of thought than any specific heresy that aroused their hostility ; and their action is not really touched by Professor Babington's demonstration that in condemning Pecock they were by anticipation condemning the Council of Trent.

Pecock wrote much, both in Latin and English, but his works have in general been destroyed by his adversaries. The most important of those remaining is his *Repressor of over much Blaming of the Clergy*, composed before his orthodoxy had become suspected. It is in great part a defence of the adoration of relics, pictures, and images, which had evidently become a scandal to many not otherwise disposed to question the doctrines of the Church. The treatment is strictly logical and scholastic ; the author continually lays down some proposition, and proceeds to demonstrate it by arguments thrown into the form of syllogisms, leaving, in his own opinion, no loophole for the adversary's escape, and making his work a very Euclid of theological science. The arguments of the Lollards also are presented with sufficient fairness,



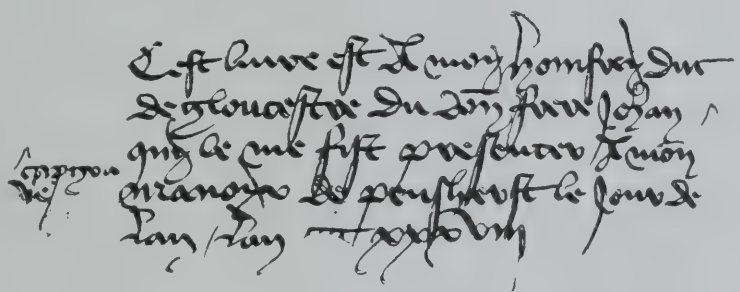
Capgrave presenting his Book on Genesis to Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester

From the MS. in Oriel College, Oxford

though, as is inevitable, only set up like ninepins to be bowled down again. The generally candid and temperate tone of argument is highly to the writer's honour, and probably helped to convince the other bishops that he was by no means the man for them or for his age. After having made the best defence for images possible, he concludes by an emphatic statement that such aids to devotion are, after all, no more in comparison with Scripture itself than moonlight to sunlight.

Pecock's peculiar method of treating his subject exerted much influence upon his style and vocabulary. He aims at transferring the style of argumentation familiar to the defenders and oppugners of theses at the universities to a popular treatise, for such his *Repression* is designed to be. He consequently had, in Professor Saintsbury's words, "to adapt the vernacular to the strictly accurate thought and precise terminology required by scholastic habits." Hence he is a great neologist, constantly introducing novelties to get closer to the ideal he has ever in his mind. As no one else ever imitated scholastic precedents with such servility his style is unique. It conveys the impression of one thinking in Latin as he speaks in English. The effect is quaint, but not unpleasing. One of his most marked peculiarities is his constant employment of tripleted phrases, using three nearly synonymous words where one would have sufficed. The following is a fair specimen of Pecock's pedantic yet racy method of argument :

> If I, being at London in the College of Whittington, bid or counsel, or witness to my servant there being with me that he go to Paul's Cross for to hear there attentively a sermon to be preached, it must needs be granted that I in so bidding, counselling or witnessing, bid, counsel, or witness that he learn or remember somewhat by the same sermon, and that some manner of new disposition, less or more, he take into his affection of something of this sermon. Forwhy all this followeth out of the attentive hearing of the sermon. Also it must needs be granted that I, in bidding, counselling, or witnessing, bid, counsel, or witness that he go forth out of the College gate. Forwhy, unless he go forth from me at the gate, he may not come to Paul's Cross for to hear the sermon. Also, sithen from the said College be many ways to Paul's Cross, and of which each is speedful and good enough for to lead to Paul's Cross, it must needs be granted that in so bidding, counselling, or witnessing, I witness that, which ever of these ways he takes, I it allow ; and if cause be found in any of the ways that by doom of reason this way ought to be left (as if peradventure in one of these ways a man lieth in wait for to slay my said servant) certes this way is not, as for then, one of the speedful ways for him into Paul's Cross. And also it must be granted that in so bidding, counselling, or witnessing, I will and allow that he go and choose the better of the ways than the less good of

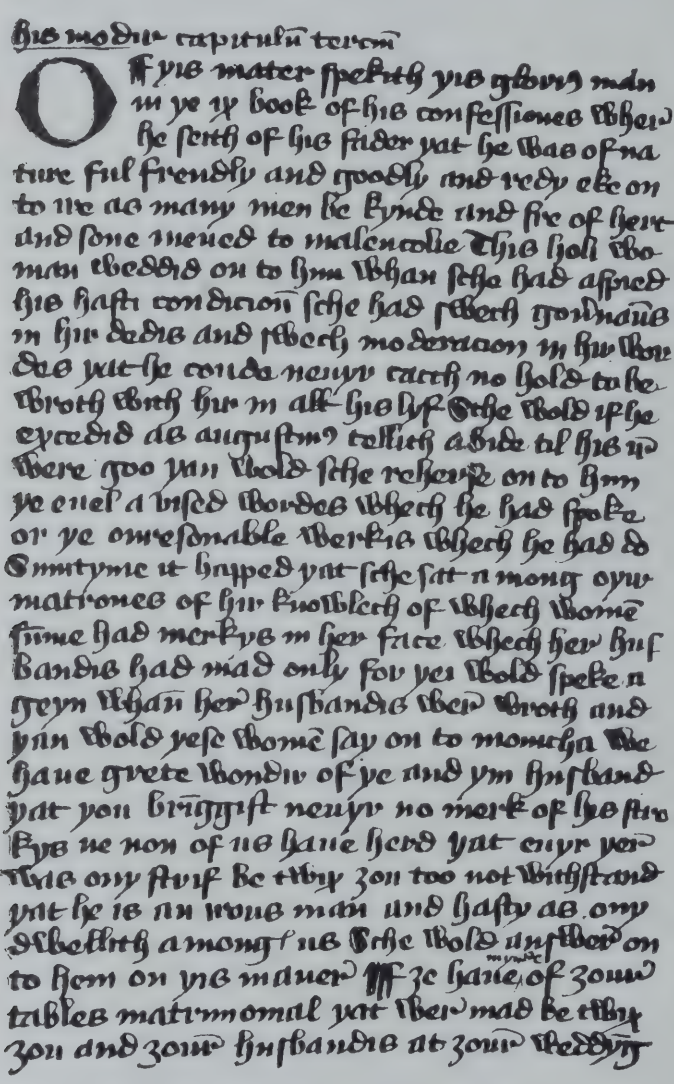


Inscription from Capgrave's Book on Genesis, stating that the book belonged to Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester

the ways, and that he in better manner hear the sermon than that he in less good manner hear the same sermon.

Thomas Gascoigne

Pecock had a bitter adversary in THOMAS GASCOIGNE (1403–1458), twice Chancellor of the University of Oxford. Gascoigne wrote in Latin, but the passages of contemporary history and biography excerpted by Professor Thorold Rogers from his Theological Dictionary deserve a word of notice from the light they cast upon the general corruption of the times. They are also important as testifying to the resentment against Rome entertained by Churchmen of unimpeachable and even fanatical orthodoxy. His comments upon individuals must be received with reserve; and his entire tone is not uncoloured by the circumstance, barely credible, he deems, save by Omniscience, that "Ego Thomas Gascoigne, Anglicus nativitate, nunquam habui mihi oblatam aliquam præbendam in aliqua ecclesia Angliæ XII. marcarum!"



Page from Capgrave's "Life of St. Gilbert"

British Museum MS. 36,704

John Capgrave

John Capgrave (1393–1464), born at Lynn Regis, was an Augustinian friar, and rose to be provincial of his order. Except for his university education, whether at Oxford or Cambridge is uncertain, and a visit to Rome, he appears to have spent nearly all his life in the Augustinian convent at Lynn. He enjoyed a great reputation among his contemporaries for learning and eloquence, and his works were numerous. The great majority, however, are written in Latin and treat of theology and scholastic philosophy, and his most important performance, *The Lives of Illustrious Henries*, is

also is Latin. His claim to a place among English writers, apart from a metrical life of St. Katherine, and some fragments of a guide to Rome, has hitherto rested solely upon his abridged *Chronicle of England*, from the Creation to 1417, but will soon be extended by the publication of a life of Saint Gilbert of Sempringham, supposed to be lost, but discovered by Dr. G. F. Warner, of the British Museum, and about to be edited by Sir E. M. Thompson for the Roxburghe Club. The early portion of the Chronicle relates chiefly to ecclesiastical affairs and to incidents of general history, and it is only when he approaches his own times that much can be learned from him respecting England. He is a strong partisan of the Lancastrian kings, not so much, apparently, from adulation, as from sympathy with their persecution of the Lollards, whom he holds in abhorrence. On the whole, the work is but little above the general level of monastic chronicles. His account of the battle of Agincourt, nevertheless, may be cited as a pattern of brevity and modesty, and a fair specimen of the English of the period:

Sir John Fortescue
From "Fortescutus Illustratus," 1663

> So on the twenty-fourth day of October the hosts met not a mile asunder. The king comforted greatly his men that they should trust in God, for that their cause was rightful. The French part stood on the hill, and we in the vale. Betwixt them was a land newharrowed, where was evil footing. Short for to say, the field fell unto the King, and the French party lost it, for all their number and their pride. There were dead the Duke of Lauson, the Duke of Braban, the Duke of Baves, five earls; the Constable eke of France, and a hundred lords; knights and squires four thousand, sixty, and nine; the common people were not numbered. In the time of the battle the brigands on the French side took the King's carriage and led it away, in which they found the King's crown. They made the bells to ring and men for to sing, "Te Deum laudamus," telling verily that the King was dead. But within a few hours after their joy was changed. The King rode to Calais and over the sea to Dover, and in the twenty-third day of November came to London, and there was received in the best manner.

Sir John Fortescue, eminent as an author, is yet more so as one of the Chief

Sir John Fortescue

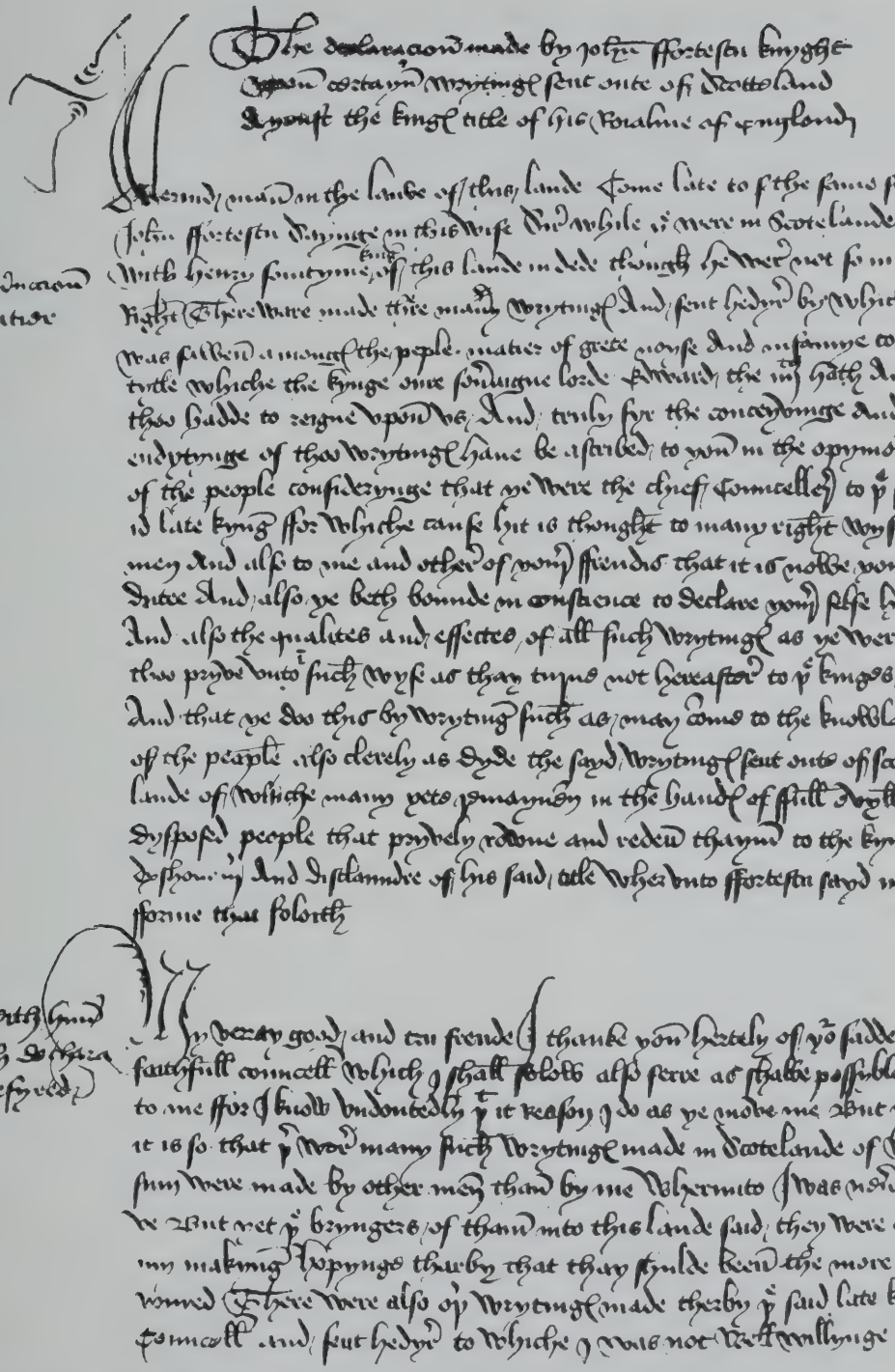
Justices who, like Gascoigne and Sir Matthew Hale, have in troubled times vindicated a reputation for impartiality. As a politician he was active on the wrong or at least the unfortunate side; as a magistrate he enjoyed universal esteem. He was born towards the close of the fourteenth century, and belonged to the eminent Devonshire family which has produced so many men of mark. After practising as sergeant-at-law, and holding a puisne judgeship, he became Chief Justice of the King's Bench in 1442. During the Wars of the Roses he adhered with a constancy unusual in that fickle age to the House of Lancaster, whose title he vindicated in several treatises. Deprived of his office and attainted by the victorious party, he took refuge successively in Scotland and in Flanders, where he suffered great hardships. He was largely instrumental in bringing about the revolution which temporarily dethroned Edward IV. in 1470; but when the Lancastrian party was crushed and his pupil, Prince Edward, slain in the battle of Tewkesbury, where he himself was made prisoner, the octogenarian made his peace with the victors and condescended to refute his own arguments on the succession. This, under the circumstances, can hardly be regarded as a blot upon his fame He retired to Ebrington, in Devonshire, and died there at the age of ninety, as is said.

Fortescue's principal English work, *The Governance of England,* is a very short one, but so full of matter as to have afforded his editor, Mr. Plummer, material for a thick volume, of which no word is superfluous. Mr. Plummer's introduction on the state of the law in Fortescue's time, and the remedies which he proposes for the anarchy occasioned by the incapacity of Henry VI., is especially valuable. Fortescue's claim to remembrance is as a lawyer and a statesman, not as man of letters, yet his style is terse and emphatic. His best known work, *De Laudibus Legum Angliæ,* written in 1470 for the instruction of Prince Edward, was originally composed in Latin, though frequently translated. *The Governance of England* was first published in 1714. Though it is a work of great merit, the standard position which it seems likely to retain in English literature will be mainly due to the exhaustive commentary of Mr. Plummer. Perhaps no passage is so well known as the demonstration that an Englishman is more valiant than a Frenchman, inasmuch as he is the stouter thief:

> It hath been oftentimes seen in England that three or four thieves for poverty have set upon six or seven true men, and robbed them all. But it hath not been seen in France that six or seven thieves have been hardy to rob three or four men. Wherefore it is right seldom that Frenchmen be hanged for robbery, for they have no hearts to do so terrible an act. There be therefore more men hanged in England in a year for robbery and manslaughter than there be hanged in France for such manner of crime in seven years. There is no man hanged in Scotland for seven years together for robbery; and yet they be oftentimes hanged for larceny, and the stealing of goods in the absence of the owners thereof. But their hearts serve them not to take a man's goods while he is present and will defend it; which manner of taking is called robbery. But the Englishman is of another courage. For if he be poor, and see another man having richesse, which may be taken from him by might, he will not spare to do so, but if that poor man be right true. Wherefore it is not poverty, but it is lack of heart and cowardice that keepeth the Frenchman from rising.

The Paston Letters

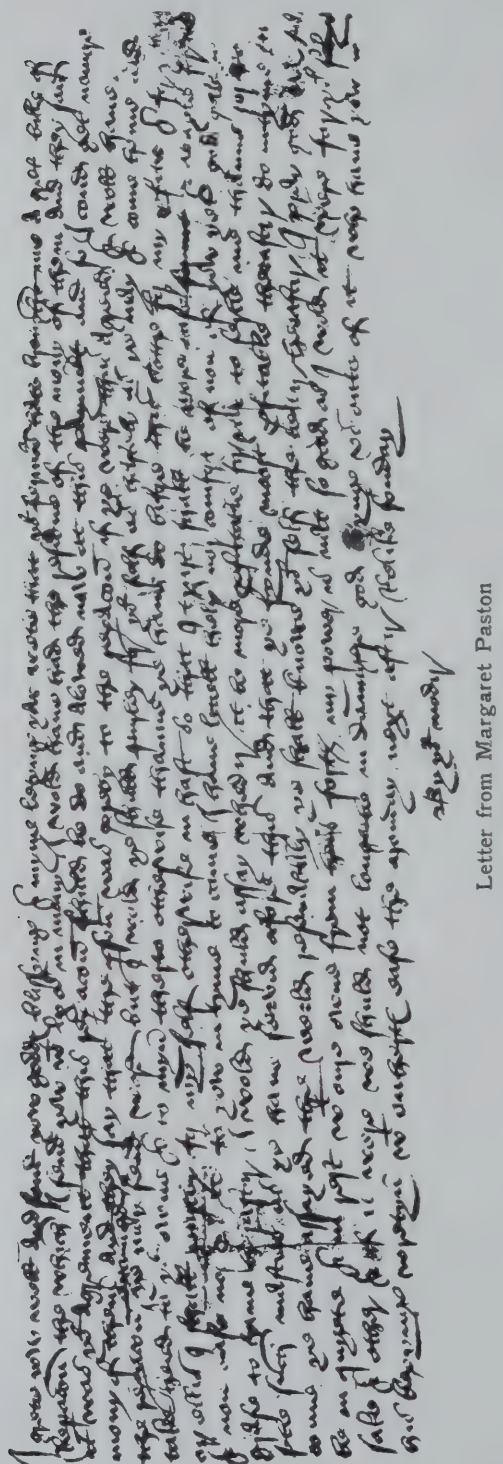
While, notwithstanding, the fruits of authorship were thus scanty and insipid, private pens, wielded without the remotest literary purpose, were being exerted in a manner destined to create little by little a monument paralleled in no other country. No other nation has anything to vie with *The Paston Letters.*



The Declaration made by John Fortescue, Knight, upon certain writings sent out of Scotland

British Museum MS. Bibl. Roy. 17, D. xv.

They are a perfect exhibition how life went on throughout the greater part of the fifteenth century in an English family of condition living in a state of constant warfare with grasping neighbours, not the less deadly for being mainly waged upon paper and parchment. As this state of affairs resulted in great measure from the dislocation of society in times of civil strife, the correspondence affords indirectly a valuable picture of the fallen condition of the country under Henry VI. and during the Wars of the Roses; while, nevertheless, the fermentation of the new is as visible as the decay of the old. Feudalism is passing away, and we assist at the birth-throes of the modern State. The letters which portray this striking scene are in general written by persons of good education for their times, but of no enlargement of mind, or any conception that they are making and recording history. They are in general the members of the Paston family in Norfolk, their lawyers, stewards, retainers, and other persons brought into connection with them. The letters are in the main on business, though domestic news and expressions of affection or the reverse are not wanting. Their unexpected recovery near the close of the eighteenth century may be compared to that equally unexpected recovery of papyri which has of late thrown such light on the social condition of Egypt under the Ptolemies and the Romans. The effect in both instances resembles the sudden opening of a window in a dead wal



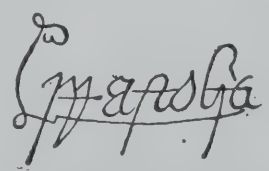
Letter from Margaret Paston

British Museum MS. 27,445

The papyri, however, from their brevity and their mutilated condition, afford mere glimpses in comparison with the flood of light which the Paston correspondence pours upon the circumstances of the time.

The Paston family history

The Paston family, who derived their name from the village of Paston, four miles from North Walsham in Norfolk, rose into notice at the beginning of the fifteenth century in the person of William Paston, justice of the common pleas. His father, Clement Paston, was a simple husbandman, and the enemies of the family endeavoured to make him out a serf; but the Pastons stoutly maintained their descent from a follower of William the Conqueror, and it would be unseemly to cavil at the evidence which satisfied King Edward IV. If of gentle blood, they were undoubtedly reduced in circumstances, and William Paston owed his prosperity and station in the world to his proficiency as a lawyer, combined, as would appear, with an amiable disposition and a high character for integrity. His life was not devoid of stirring incidents, but the interest of the Paston family history begins with his son, John Paston, less on account of any peculiarity in the character of this personage, an average country gentleman of his day, shrewd, clear-headed, and exempt from sentimental weaknesses, than from the extraordinary tangle of disputes in which he was engaged and the aggressions which he had to resist, all symptomatic of a disorganised condition of society. The mushroom prosperity of the Pastons had evidently excited ill will, and enemies arose on every side to despoil them. Lord de Moleyns, apparently without a shadow of right, seized and kept by force a manor lawfully acquired by the Pastons from Thomas Chaucer, the reputed son of the poet. Paston was obliged to spend much of his time in London, making interest at Court for the confusion of De Moleyns and other depredators, sometimes making acquaintance with the interior of the Fleet. Two persons with whom he had much connection shine forth as striking characters. One is his wife, Margaret Paston, a model of domestic affection, housewifely diligence, and prudent management of all family business, her husband's representative during his absence from home, and able to cope with any perplexity or adversity. The other, Paston's neighbour and patron, and the chief factor in the prosperity to which the family ultimately attained, is a much more celebrated personage, no other than the veteran warrior, Sir John Fastolf, whose victories and defeats in the French wars are now but as dust in the balance in comparison with his supposed identification with Sir John Falstaff. That Shakespeare took the name of Falstaff from Fastolf seems certain, and some local particulars respecting Southwark, a haunt of Fastolf's, appear to imply that the identification may have gone somewhat farther. It was also Fastolf's misfortune to have been once, very unjustly as it would seem, charged with cowardice; and Shakespeare, in search of a comic trait, availed himself of the hint, taking advantage of the groundless aspersion and the corollaries naturally deducible from it to create the most comic of comic personages. Nothing, apparently



Autograph of Sir John Fastolf

could in reality less resemble Falstaff than his alleged prototype. "He had," says Mr. Gairdner, "been abroad with Henry V. at Agincourt and at the Siege of Rouen. He had afterwards served in France under the Regent Bedford, had taken several strong castles and one illustrious prisoner, had held the government of conquered districts, and had fought, generally with success and glory, in almost every great battle of the period." He was also a knight of the garter and a privy councillor. There were, indeed, serious deviations from the ideal which distinctions so honourable might seem to involve, but these were quite of another kind than the shortcomings of the theatrical Falstaff. "From the general tenor," says Mr. Gairdner, "of most of his letters we should certainly no more suspect him of being the old soldier that he actually was than of being Shakespeare's fat disorderly knight. Every sentence in them refers to lawsuits and title-deeds, extortions and injuries received from others, forged processes affecting property, writs of one kind or another to be issued against his adversaries, libels uttered against himself, and matters of the like description. Altogether the perusal is apt to give us an impression that Sir John would have made an acute and able, though perhaps not very high-minded, solicitor." Decidedly Fastolf bears less resemblance to Falstaff than to another famous creation of the comic stage.[1]

Caister Castle

From a drawing by C. R. B. Barrett

The Paston family affairs

Fastolf was neither amiable nor popular, but his hardness and selfishness were in some measure redeemed by an aspiring purpose, which recalls Warren Hastings's ambition to recover the patrimonial estate at Daylesford. He would build a splendid castle at Caister, the place of his birth, and connect it with a pious foundation for his soul's health. The castle was built, and a noble tower, ninety feet high, and foundations covering six acres, remain to attest its magnificence. During the last five years of his life Fastolf inhabited

[1] *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac.* Oui : mais, quand il y aurait information, ajournement, décret et jugement obtenu par surprise, défaut et contumace, j'ai la voie de conflit de juridiction pour temporiser et venir aux moyens de nullité qui seront dans les procédures.

Sbrigani. L'on voit bien, monsieur, que vous êtes du métier.

Monsieur de Pourceaugnac. Moi ! point du tout. Je suis gentilhomme.

Sbrigani. Il faut bien, pour parler ainsi, que vous ayez étudié la pratique.

Monsieur de Pourceaugnac. Ce sont quelques mots que j'ai retenu en lisant les romans.

it, and all this time the influence of his neighbour and cousin Paston, aided by a friend at court, the knight's confessor, Friar Brackley, grew and grew until upon the old warrior's decease in 1459, Paston was found heir to all his lands in Norfolk and Suffolk, subject to a payment of four thousand marks and the obligation of establishing in Caister Castle a college of monks and poor men to pray for the souls of Fastolf and his family. For some years following the history of the Paston family is highly dramatic. Everybody fell upon the upstarts. The Duke of Norfolk seized Caister Castle. The will was contested, and Paston, unjustly in all likelihood, was accused of forging it. Fastolf's disposition was not, in fact, unreasonable. He had no near relatives, and it was but natural that he should entrust the care of his earthly monument and his spiritual weal to an able and approved friend. Paston, nevertheless, was three times imprisoned in the Fleet, and although he recovered Caister, bequeathed at his death in 1466 a succession beset by harassing lawsuits. His son, an amiable man, but indolent and careless, left the family affairs chiefly in the hands of his exemplary mother and his younger brother, spending much of his time upon the Continent. For a time the family was in the greatest jeopardy from their espousal of the cause of Henry VI. during the brief revolution which ended on the field of Tewkesbury. Matters were at length arranged, and the Pastons remained in possession of the greater part of Sir John Fastolf's estates, including Caister Castle; but the benefaction for the intended college was transferred to Magdalen College, Oxford, a foundation of Bishop Waynflete, one of Fastolf's executors. With the death of Sir John Paston in 1479 the liveliness, copiousness, and historical value of the correspondence cease, though it straggles down to 1509.

Characteristics of the Paston correspondence

There is no such testimony anywhere to the social condition of England, ere records had been multiplied by the art of printing, as is afforded by the Paston correspondence; and the constant encounter with interesting and graphic particulars renders it most attractive reading. Of strictly literary merit the letters have little; yet the clearness and propriety with which the writers, belonging to diverse ranks and orders of society, manage in general to convey their meaning, show that the education of the day was really good and thorough as far as it went. They are in harmony with the literary tendencies of their time in being entirely utilitarian. Nothing else, it may be said, could be expected from family letters written on matters of business, but the writers make us feel that their interests are limited to the ordinary affairs of life. Save for one book-bill, there is no hint of the existence of such a thing as literature; no vestige of admiration for natural beauty; stirring events are narrated with cold formality; the dramatic vicissitudes of the day awaken no emotion of loyalty; and of patriotism there is not a trace. Society, left to itself, would be entirely anarchical; fortunately, the need for some judicial system is recognised in theory; and even when the central authority is in abeyance the gradual softening of manners indisposes to open violence, and inclines men to avail themselves of the quirks and quillets of the law. Nothing seems more remarkable than the general acquaintance of the laity with legal phraseology and

technicalities; men have not yet reached the stage when their rights are safe from lawless encroachment, but they are in a stage of development when these can be successfully defended by pen and ink. The general sordidness of the picture is in some measure relieved by the vigorous portraiture of the leading personages: the elder Sir John Paston, shrewd and hard; his gay and careless successor, intent on horse and hound; the grim veteran Fastolf, slowly sinking like a battered ship, but with colours flying to the last; Dame Margaret Paston, a thoroughly lovable person, with her wifely duty to her husband, and a solicitude for her son's interests which lends force to her frequent chidings. The following portion of one of her letters will show that the English gentry of the fifteenth century could express themselves on paper with no inconsiderable vigour:

Lancelot at a Tournament

From the French Romance of Lancelot du Lac, 1513

> I would ye should purvey for yourself as hastily as ye may, and come home and take heed to your own and to mine, thereto, otherwise than ye have done before this, both for my profit and for yours, or else I shall purvey for myself otherwise in haste, so that I trust shall be more ease and avail for me and none ease nor profit to you in time to come. I have little help nor comfort of you yet, God give me grace to have more hereafter. I would ye should assay whether it be more profitable for you to serve me than for to serve such masters as ye have served afore this; and, that ye find more profitable thereafter, do in time to come. Ye have assayed the world reasonably, ye shall know yourself better hereafter. I pray God we may be in quiet and in rest with our own from henceforth. My power is not so good as I would it were for your sake and other; and if it were, we should not long be in danger. God bring us out of it, who have you in his keeping. Written with unheartsease the Monday next after Relic Sunday,
>
> By your Mother.

Discovery and re-discovery of the letters

The Paston family continued to flourish until the days of Charles II., when its representative was raised to the peerage as Earl of Yarmouth. This was the term of its prosperity, the second earl dissipated the property, and the family became extinct at his death. He had previously sold the treasured family correspondence to the antiquary Le Neve. After passing through various hands it came to another antiquary, John Fenn, who published two volumes of extracts in 1787, and, in acknowledgment of the honour of knighthood thus earned, presented the originals to George III. These originals, as well as those of volumes subsequently published, mysteriously

Here foloweth the fyrth boke of the noble and worthy prynce kyng Arthur.

How fyr Launcelot and fyr Lyonell departed fro the courte for to seke auentures / & how fyr Lyonell lefte fyr Launcelot sleppynge & was taken. Capm. j.

AFter that the noble & worthy kyng Arthur was comen fro Rome in to Englande / all the knyghtes of the rounde table resorted vnto ỹ kyng and made many iustes and turneymentes / & some there were that were good knyghtes / whiche encreased so in armes and worshyp that they passed all theyr felowes in prowesse & noble dedes & that was well proued on many. But in especyall it was proued on fyr Launcelot du lake. For in all turneymentes and iustes and dedes of armes / bothe for lyfe and deth he passed all knyghtes & at no tyme he was neuer ouercomen but yf it were by treason or enchauntement. Syr Launcelot encreased so meruaylously in worshyp & honour / wherfore he is the first knyght ỹ the frenshe booke maketh mencyon of / after that kynge Arthur came from Rome / wherfore quene Gueneuer had hym in grete fauour aboue all other knyghtes / and certaynly he loued the quene agayne aboue all other ladyes and damoyselles all the dayes of his lyfe / and for her he

A Page from Malory's "Mort d'Arthur," 1529

Printed by Wynkyn de Worde

disappeared, and it is not surprising that Herman Merivale should have questioned the genuineness of the correspondence. It was vindicated by Mr. James Gairdner, and ere long the soundness of his judgment was proved by the retrieval of all the missing portions, with many additional letters, from the old country mansions where they had been hidden away. The entire collection is now accessible in Mr. Gairdner's elegant and convenient edition (1900).

Malory's "Morte d'Arthur"

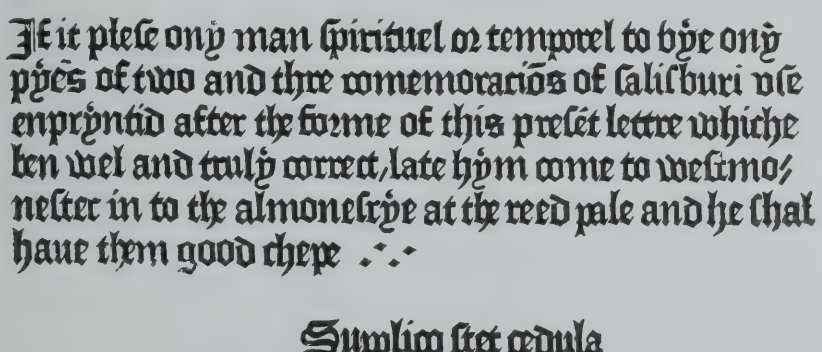
While the writers of the Paston letters were at their busiest, the other work which preserves the middle of the fifteenth century from absolute barrenness was employing the pen of a knight, probably a soldier. *Le Morte d'Arthur* of SIR THOMAS MALORY would have been a brilliant star in any century, and almost monopolises the starless literary heaven of the fifteenth. Yet it is no original work, but in the main a translation, and cannot be contemplated apart from the general movement of which it is a portion. Schiller's saying that what would live in song must die on earth, is fully exemplified in the chivalric revival of this age. It was purely literary, sentimental, romantic, and idealistic. Chivalry as a tangible institution, apart from the chivalric emotions which will never forsake the human breast, was dead and gone beyond recall. But its beautiful traits, seen backwards through a long vista of years, and touched with the charm which remoteness ever imparts, aroused the enthusiasm of men who had little faith in giants and enchanters, and had no idea of disusing gunpowder. It was instinctively felt that the chivalric ideal afforded a model which, though incapable of being followed implicitly, might be highly serviceable in promoting the growth of civility, and restraining the rudeness of which the finer minds were becoming ashamed. The notion naturally took the deepest root in courtly circles, to which men of letters, when not priests or professors, commonly belonged or attached themselves. This was very necessary, since, from changes of language and ideas, the old books of chivalry had become obsolete, and needed to be replaced by others in accordance with the spirit of the age. France set to work in prose, Italy in verse, and the genius of a single man whose work narrowly escaped destruction provided England with a representation of the ideal chivalric life so complete within the limits of a single book that nothing needed to be added to it.

Malory's subject and style

Malory's forte was not invention, at the same time he was more than a translator. He combined detached romances into a congruous whole, and though he did not actually create any character, the personages of the old stories which he handled almost appear new in the glow of his ardent feeling The subjects which he selected, as the title of his works imports, belong entirely to the Arthurian cycle of romance. In this he followed the French romancers, whose subjects had been largely borrowed from Brittany, the Wales of France. "The most admirable fables of King Arthur," says Dante, speaking of the French literature of his day. An adequate idea of the effect produced upon the old Arthurian legends of Wales by transplantation to French soil may be obtained by a comparison of the two strata of fiction, pure Welsh and Welsh Normanised, which compose the Mabinogion. In the former we have the

genuine Celtic spirit, quaint and crude, but intensely poetical; in the latter we have this in alliance with the spirit of mediæval chivalry, decked with new splendour and preserving much of the Celtic scenery and manners, yet at one remove from the original fount which burst forth in Wales, and, like the Arethusa of classic legend, flowed under the sea to break out again in Brittany. The style of Malory's romance so greatly resembles the Normanised Welsh fiction of the latter portions of the Mabinogion, of which the Geraint story upon which Tennyson has founded two of the *Idylls of the King* is a characteristic example, that he might well have been one of the writers. The return of Cambrian fiction to Wales in a Norman dress is like the return of the olive-bearing dove to the Ark.

The Arthurian was but one of two great cycles of romance revived in the fifteenth century to become important factors in the literature of the age. What Arthur was to Britain, Charlemagne was to Italy and in some measure to France also. Malory betrays no acquaintance with the great Emperor, but a French romance upon him is among the publications of Caxton. It is characteristic of the difference between the nations that while the first


If it plese ony man spirituel or temporel to bye ony pyës of two and thre commemoracions of salisburi vse enprynted after the forme of this present lettre whiche ben wel and truly correct, late hym come to westmo; nester in to the almonestrye at the reed pale and he shal haue them good chepe

Supplico stet cedula

Caxton's Advertisement at Westminster

Bodleian Library

important Italian poem on the Charlemagne legend, the *Morgante Maggiore* of Pulci, is rather comic than serious, and a vein of polite raillery traverses even the *Orlando Innamorato* of Boiardo, Malory, though not averse to the introduction of a humorous character or scene, writes with an air of profoundest belief. Knowing so little of his personality as we do, we are at liberty to conceive of him as an English Quixote, fed upon antique romance until he burns to emulate its exploits, but who, instead of sallying forth like Don Quixote in quest of adventures, takes the pen in place of the sword and digests the romances which have charmed him into a single corpus, "thrumming," like Layamon before him, many old books into one.

Malory's identity has been the occasion of much speculation and conjecture. Bale's notion that he was a Welshman was probably a mere inference from his choice of subject. He has been identified with the Sir Thomas Malory excepted in 1468 from a general pardon; he has been connected with the Malorys of Hutton Conyers, in

Yorkshire; and with the Thomas Malory of Papworth, in Cambridgeshire, whose will, made in September, was proved in October 1469: but at last Professor Kittredge seems to have proved that he was Sir Thomas Malory of Newbold Revell, Warwickshire, a follower of Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, who was member for his county in 1444–45 and died on March 14, 1471. That he was also a follower of Beauchamp's grandson, Warwick the Kingmaker, seems probable from the extremely slight notice taken of him by Caxton when publishing his work under Richard III.: his name is merely mentioned, and that tribute to the author's merits is omitted which might well have been looked for in a posthumous publication. It is remarkable that the book was issued on July 31, 1485, the day before Henry VII.'s embarkation at Harfleur, and only twenty-two days before the battle of Bosworth Field gave the throne to this Welsh prince, who named his son Arthur. No manuscript has ever been found, and it seems certain that the work was unknown until Caxton printed it, and that the impression was made from the author's own copy, or perhaps a *rifaccimento* of this by Caxton: for there are numerous oversights in the division of chapters and other points which could hardly have been committed by the author himself. It has also been thought that the remarkable peculiarities of diction, and still more of syntax, with which the book abounds, are more likely to have proceeded from Caxton than Malory.

Publication of "Le Morte d'Arthur" by Caxton

Whatever Caxton's sins of omission or commission, he has laid English literature under an immense obligation by insuring the preservation of the book, while his criticism shows how well he could appreciate its desert. He had had, he said, doubts respecting it, inasmuch as "divers men hold opinion that there was no such Arthur, and that all such books as have been made of him be feigned and fables, because that some chronicles make of him no mention, nor remember him nothing, nor of his knights." Happily these doubts were propounded in the hearing of judicious persons, one of whom rejoined "that in him who should say or think that there never was such a king called Arthur might well be aretted[1] great folly and blindness. First, ye may see his sepulchre in the monastery of Glastonbury;" with so much more to the same effect that "I, according to my copy, have set it in imprint, to the intent that noble men may see and learn the noble acts of chivalry, the gentle and virtuous deeds that some knights used in those days, by which they came to honour, and how they that were vicious were punished and put oft to shame and rebuke: humbly beseeching all noble lords and ladies, with all other estates of what estate or degree they been of, that shall see or read in this said book and work, that they take the good and honest acts in their remembrance, and to follow the same. Wherein they shall find many joyous and pleasant histories, and noble and renowned acts of humanity, gentleness, and chivalry. For herein may be seen noble chivalry, courtesy, humanity, friendliness, hardiness, love, friendship, cowardice, murder, hate, virtue and sin."

Sources of "Le Morte d'Arthur"

This is the best general account of *Le Morte d'Arthur* that has yet been given, although Mr. Andrew Lang has made a valuable contribution by pointing out how its "splendid patchwork" is harmonised and solemnised by

[1] Adjudged.

For J wote wel. of what ſomeuer condicion women ley in Grece. the women of this contre ley right good/ wyſe/ play ſant/ humble/ diſcrete/ ſobre/ chaſt/ obedient to their huſbon/ dis/ trewe/ ſecrete/ ſtedfaſt/ euer leſy/ & neuer ydle/ Attempe rat in ſpeking/ and vertuous in alle their werkis. or atte leſte ſholde be ſoo/ For whiche cauſes ſo euydent my ſayd lord as J ſuppoſe thoughte it was not of neceſſite to ſette in his book the ſaiengis of his Auctor ſocrates touchyng women But for as moche as J had comādemēt of my ſayd lordy to correcte and amende where as J ſholde fynde fawte/ and other fynde J none ſauf that he hath left out theſe dictes & ſaynges of the women of Grece/ Therfore in accompliſſhig his comandement for as moche as J am not in certayn wh̄ er it was in my lordis coppe or not. or ellis perauenture that the wynde had blowe ouer the leef/ at the tyme of trāſ lacion of his booke/ J purpoſe to wryte the ſame ſaynges of that Greke Socrates/ whiche wrote of the women of grece and nothyng of them of this Royame/ whom J ſup poſe he neuer knewe/ For if he had J dar plainly ſaye that he wold haue reſerued them eſpeciall in his ſayd dictes Alway not preſumyng to put & ſette them in my ſayd lor des book/ but entende aparte in the reherſayll of the werkis humbly requiryng al them that ſhal rede this lytyl reher ſayll that yf they fynde ony fawte tarette it to Socrates and not to me whiche wryteth as here after folowyth

SOcrates ſayde That women ley thapparayles to cacche men/ but they take none but them that wil be pure/ or els them that knowe hem not. Andy he ſayde that ther is none ſo grete empeſchement vnto a man

A Page from "Dictes and Sayeings of the Philosophers," printed by Caxton in 1477

the dignified conclusion "in tenderness and inexpiable sorrow," as Shelley says of the *Iliad*. Patchwork the book certainly is. The various sources which contributed to form the Lancelot episode, almost the pith of the book, but not originally belonging to the cycle of Arthurian tradition, are fully investigated in Miss Jessie Weston's *Legend of Sir Lancelot du Lac* (1901) Of these, of course, Malory knew nothing. The sources of his compilation, so far as he was distinctly conscious of them or they have hitherto been traced, are thus set forth in Mr. Sidney Lee's article in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Books I.–IV. are based on the French romance of Merlin, by Robert de Borron. Book V. is from *La Morte Arthure*, an English metrical romance. Book VI. is from the French romance of Lancelot. The sources of Book VII. have not been traced. Books VIII.–X. follow the French romance of Tristan. Books XI.–XIX. follow the French Lancelot with some variations and something original with Malory, or whose sources are unascertained. Books XX. and XXI. for the most part render into prose the original English metrical romance, *Le Mort Arthur*. It will be observed at once that there can be no unity or action in such a medley: what gives the book coherence is not artistic skill, but unity of spirit and feeling. Seldom, perhaps, has translation so universally and deservedly enjoyed the honours usually reserved to original composition. As Mr. Lang observes, the book occupies in English literature a position infinitely higher than its French originals ever held in the literature of France. For these there is no popular revival, but Malory's vitality is attested by edition after edition in the nineteenth century. The principal drawback, vehemently denounced by Roger Ascham, the extent to which the action depends upon adultery, is Malory's *damnosa haereditas* from his Celtic originals. It is, as has been pointed out, an almost unfailing accompaniment of Celtic romance. Malory has frankly accepted it, but has not committed Tennyson's great mistake of insisting upon it to such a degree as to contaminate all the beauty of his work.

If Caxton manipulated Malory to the extent that some have supposed, he at all events did not spoil him. We know from his own criticism upon Chaucer that he admired clearness and brevity, and these he either preserved or communicated to his original. Malory's anomalous constructions may have made the Quintilians of his time as of ours stare and gasp, but they do not render him obscure for the readers of any period. The following is an average example of his generally uniform style:

> Then he dressed him again to the castle and jousted with seven knights more and there was none of them might withstand him, but he bare them to the earth. And of these twelve knights he slew in plain jousts four. And the eight knights he made them to swear on the cross of a sword that they should never use the evil customs of the castle. And when he had made them to swear that oath he let them pass. And ever stood the lords and ladies on the castle walls crying and saying: "Knight with the Red Shield, ye have marvellously well done as ever we saw knight do." And therewith came a knight out of the castle unarmed, and said: "Knight with the Red Shield, overmuch damage hast thou done to us this day, therefore return whither thou wilt, for here are no more that will have ado with thee; for we repent sore that ever thou camest here, for by thee is fordone the

old custom of this castle." And with that word he turned again into the castle, and shut the gates. Then the Knight of the Red Shield turned and called his squires, and so passed forth on his way and rode a great pace.

And when he was past Sir Palomides went to Sir Dinadan and said: "I had never such a shame of one knight that ever I met; and therefore I cast me to ride after him and be revenged with my sword, for on horseback I deem I shall get no worship of him." "Sir Palomides," said Dinadan, "ye shall not meddle with him by my counsel, for ye shall get no worship of him, and for this cause ye have seen him this day have had overmuch to do, and overmuch travailed." "By almighty Jesu," said Palomides, "I shall never be at ease till that I have had ado with him." "Sir," said Dinadan, "I shall give you my beholding." "Well," said Palomides, "then shall ye see how we shall redress our mights." So they took their horses of their varlets and rode after the Knight with the Red Shield; and down

Earl Rivers presenting his Book to Edward IV.

From the "Dictes and Sayeings of the Philosophers," printed by Caxton in 1477
MS. Lambeth 265

in a valley beside a fountain they were ware where he was alighted to repose him, and had done off his helm for to drink at the well.

Malory's excel ence as a narrator

Malory, or rather his French original, was, as will have been seen, an admirable narrator. His great defect is to be almost devoid of those touches of natural magic which adorn the original Celtic romances. Exquisite morsels of an original Cymric or Breton text do indeed appear to gleam forth at times, but these are rarely descriptive. Nor does he abound in set passages of eloquence: one however, Sir Ector's lamentation for Lancelot, has, thanks mainly to his modern editors and imitators, obtained a renown in English literature hardly inferior to that of David's lament for Saul and Jonathan:

Then went Sir Bors unto Sir Ector, and told him how there lay his brother, Sir Lancelot, dead; and then Sir Ector threw his shield, sword, and helm from him. And when he beheld Sir Lancelot's visage he fell down in a swoon. And when he waked it was hard for any tongue to tell the doleful complaints that he made for his brother. "Ah, Lancelot," he said, "thou wert head of all Christian knights, and now, I dare say," said Sir Ector, "thou Sir Lancelot, there thou liest, that thou wert never matched of earthly knight's hand. And thou were the courteousest knight that ever bare shield. And thou wert the truest friend to thy lover that ever bestrod horse. And thou wert the truest lover of a sinful man that ever loved woman. And thou wert the kindest man that ever struck with sword. And thou wert the goodliest person that ever came among press of knights. And thou was the meekest man and the gentlest that ever ate in hall among ladies. And thou wert the sternest knight to thy mortal foe that ever put spear in the rest." Then there was weeping and dolour out of measure.

Printing invented in Germany

Printing in the Fifteenth Century

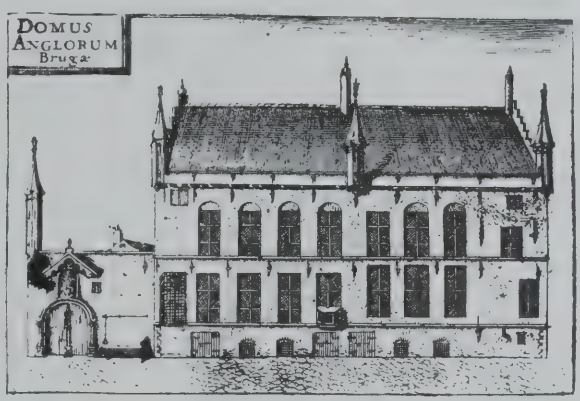
From "Stände und Hanawerker," by Jobst Amman

Our mention of Caxton as Malory's publisher and editor has foreshadowed the event which, even more than the great competing achievement of the discovery of America, has made the fifteenth century glorious in the annals of the world. This is not the place to enter into the questions connected with the discovery of printing. The one essential fact is that, by whomsoever and wheresoever invented, the art for several years after its manifestation virtually remained the exclusive property of Gutenberg's city. In 1460 it emigrated from Mainz to Strasburg, in 1461 it was planted at Bamberg, but almost everything that was printed was executed at Mainz by Mainz workmen, until in 1462 an event otherwise unimportant, a contest for the archbishopric between rival prelates, scattered the artisans over Europe, and with them the seeds of many sciences, and the sparks of many conflagrations. Nothing could more forcibly illustrate the want of a reading public, the anti-social character of trade restrictions, and the extraordinary unimaginativeness of mankind at large. The one person who seems to have had anything like a glimpse of its momentous character was the Cardinal of Cusa, who, according to the Bishop of Aleria, so ardently desired the introduction of printing into Italy, that the Bishop cannot but attribute the accomplishment of his aspiration to his intercession with the Almighty after his decease. It came in 1465, but the printers in Italy continued to be Germans, until in 1471 Philippus de Lignamine appeared upon the scene, and the good priest Clemens Patavinus taught himself the art without having seen a printer at work. It is a glory of England that while the typographic art was introduced into most other countries by foreigners, it was given to her by a citizen of her own. The first printers, moreover, were for the

most part mere handicraftsmen, who were obliged to have recourse to scholars for their prefaces and their dedications, for their indexes and the correction of their press. But WILLIAM CAXTON was a man of letters and a man of affairs. He was not brought up to the trade of printing, but condescended to it after having exercised functions regarded by his contemporaries as much more important. He needed no advice in the selection of the books he printed, and, while strictly adhering to his trade after once taking it up, wrote enough in the way of comment and illustration to entitle himself to an honourable place on the roll of English authors.

William Caxton

William Caxton was born in the Weald of Kent, perhaps near the manor of Haddon, which had formerly belonged to a family of the same name. The condition of his parents is not expressly stated, but they were probably in moderately good circumstances, since Caxton in later life expresses his obligations to them for having sent him to school, and they were subsequently able to apprentice him to a wealthy London mercer, who became Lord Mayor in the following year. The date of the apprenticeship was 1438, justifying the supposition that Caxton was born about 1422. In 1441 Caxton's master, Robert Large, died, bequeathing to him twenty marks as a token of esteem. Caxton soon afterwards went to Bruges, probably to represent his employers, and in 1446 he set up in business there on his own account. He became a member of the Mercers' Company at home, and must have risen to great credit abroad, for when, in 1462, Edward IV. gave the Merchant Adventurers a new charter for the better government of the English merchants settled in the Low Countries, and accorded them power to appoint a governor at Bruges, Caxton was the first to fill the office, which was no sinecure. "With a small jury of fellow-merchants he decided all disputes among English merchants in the Low Countries; he regulated and personally overlooked the importation and exportation of merchandise, and he corresponded with the English Government on commercial matters." Functions like these served as an introduction to diplomacy. Caxton was made one of the Commissioners to renew a treaty with the Duke of Burgundy, which business, together with the complications growing out of it, gave him employment for several years. When at length, in 1468, matters were arranged through the marriage of Edward IV.'s sister with the new Duke of Burgundy, Caxton seems to have found the need of occupation; for five months after the definitive conclusion of the treaty in October 1468 he began to turn *Le Recueil des Histoires de Troye* into English "as a preventive against idleness." Partly from increasing partiality for literature, partly from the favour shown him by the Duchess, he gradually drifted from a mercantile into a court life. In October 1470 King Edward



The House at Bruges occupied by Caxton

From "Flandria Illustrata," 1641

the playsyr of god to whome I
submytte al myn entēte to write
no thyng that ought to be bla-
medy/ne but that it be to the hel-
the & sauacion of euery persone/

Thenne for as moche I
late had fynysshed my
enprynte the book of the noble &
victorious kyng Arthur fyrst
of the thre moost noble & wor-
thy of crysten kynges/and also
how had reduced in to englisshe
the noble hystorye & lyf of Go-
defroy of bolleyn kyng of Iheru-
salem/last of the said iij worthy
Somme persones of noble estate
and degree haue desyred me to
reduce thystorye and lyf of the
noble and crysten prynce Char-
les the grete kyng of fraunce &
emperour of Rome / the seconde
of the thre worthy/to thende that
thystorye /actes/ & lyues may
be had in our maternal tongue
lyke as they be in latyn or in
frenssh / For the moost quanty-
te of the people vnderstonde not
latyn ne frenssh here in this no-
ble royame of englond/ And for
to satysfye the desyre & requeste
of my goode synguler lordes &
specyal maysters and frendes
I haue enprysed and concluded
in my self to reduce this sayd
book in to our englysshe /as al
abonge and playnely ye may
rede/here/ and see in thys book
here folowyng/besechyng al them
that shal fynde faute in the same
to correcte and amende it/ And
also to pardone me of the rude &
symple reducyng /and though
so be there be no gaye termes/ne
subtyl ne nelve eloquence /yet I
hope that it shal be vnderstonden
& to that entente I haue spedy-
ally reduced it /after the sym-
ple connyng that god hath lente
to me/wherof I humbly & with
al my herte thanke hym /& also
am bounden to praye for my fa-
der and moders soules/ that in
my youthe sette me to scole /by
whyche by the suffraunce of god
I gete my lyuyng I hope truly
And that I may so do & conty-
nue I byseche hym to graūte me
of his grace / and so to labour
and occupye my self vertuously
that I may come oute of dette &
dedely synne/that after this lyf
I may come to hys blysse in he-
uen AMEN /

A Page from "Charles the Grete," printed by Caxton in 1485

appeared in Flanders in the character of a fugitive and exile, and Caxton can hardly have failed to be brought into connection with him. In 1471 he completed the translation of the *Recueil*, and hit upon the idea which made him famous by resolving not merely to have the book printed, but to print it himself. To this end it was needful for him to learn the art of printing, so far as we know not possessed, certainly not exercised in the capacity of master-printer, by any Englishman before him. France, which has been thought, not without plausible grounds, to have had the first glimmering conception of the art, had practically received it only the year before from German hands. Spain had still to wait three years, Poland four; and although the art had probably been practised for some years in Holland, there was as yet no Dutch book with a date. Germany and Italy alone were active: and Caxton is the only man in fifteenth-century Europe of whom it can be affirmed with certainty that he deliberately took up printing from a distinct perception of its importance as an agent in the propagation of literature.

Paper-making in the Fifteenth Century

From "Stände und Handwerker," by Jobst Amman

Caxton's career as a printer

Caxton's principal coadjutor, whose name should always be remembered along with his, was probably actuated by different motives. We are told that Colard Mansion of Bruges, had been "a skilful caligrapher," whose reason for taking up printing would be the same as that which has in our own day induced so many miniaturists to turn photographers. Though Caxton's colleague, he does not appear to have been his instructor. It seems probable that Caxton learned printing at Cologne, and, returning thence to Bruges, executed his *Recuyell* in partnership with Mansion about 1474. It was, therefore, the first English printed book, but not the first book printed in England. *The Game and Play of the Chess*, not a treatise upon the game but a moralisation of it, translated from a French version of the Latin original of Jacobus de Cessolis, was until recently considered as the first printed English book, but is now allowed to have been but the second, and like its predecessor to have been printed at Bruges. Caxton says that he completed the translation in March 1475, and the book was no doubt printed in the same year. In 1476 Caxton returned to his native country after an absence of thirty-five years, and established himself at Westminster, renting a shop from the Dean and Chapter at the annual rent of ten shillings from Michaelmas 1476. In November 1477 he issued the first book printed in England, *The Dictes and Sayings of the Philosophers*, a translation from the French by no less influential a person than Earl Rivers, the King's brother-in-law and governor of the

little Prince of Wales, for whose prospective benefit the version was probably made. Edward IV. and his successors did themselves honour by their patronage of Caxton, who also took rank as a man of letters by his publication of the *Dictes*, revising Rivers's version at the latter's request, and humorously dilating on his omission of Socrates in his relation to the female sex.

Caxton as printer and publisher

The highly interesting history of Caxton's press, so ably elucidated by Mr. Blades, only falls within our subject in so far as it affords a clue to the literary taste and general culture of the time. On these points Caxton, however unintentionally, is a sure guide, for he was an eminently practical man. The whole character of his mind, mirrored in the general style of his publications, assures us that he would be the last person to give his countrymen what, however salutary for them, they were not conscious of requiring. When we find that he never prints a classic in the original language, we may be sure that there was then no demand for such literature in England. Had Caxton's press been set up at Oxford or Cambridge, he might possibly have been tempted by the prospect of learned patronage to speculate in Latin editions of Latin books; but clearly no allurement of the kind presented itself at London or Westminster. On the other hand, Englishmen did not object to read classical authors in their own language, and Caxton published versions of Cicero, *De Amicitia* and *De Senectute*, which latter may have been that made for Sir John Fastolf. More significant is the evidence of a taste for English poetry afforded by Caxton's editions of Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate, works expensive to produce, and upon which he would not have ventured without the assurance of popular support. His edition of Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* is an enterprise of the same class. On the whole, the leading departments of literature as represented in the Caxton press may be defined as theology and romance. The total number of his known publications, now extant, issued in England between his first publication in 1477 and his death in 1491, is seventy-one, excluding repeated editions of the same work, which would raise the number to 102. Allowing for the deference which he was compelled as a man of business to accord to popular taste, great credit is due to Caxton for his power of initiative in the conduct of his affairs. Everything appears to have been done by himself. There is no trace of any help from a

Bookbinding in the Fifteenth Century

From "Stände und Handwerker," by Jobst Amman

reader or a literary adviser. He was his own editor and generally his own translator. He did not, indeed, decline to receive suggestions; the *Book of Good Manners* was translated and published at the request of his friend William Pratt; and the remarkable publication of the official letters from the Republic of Venice to Pope Sixtus IV. must have been made at the instance of the Venetians. In the main, however, Caxton's publications undoubtedly exhibit the tastes of Caxton as well as of his public. It may be regretted that he had not some counsellor near him who could have influenced him in the direction of typographic elegance, for he was no Jenson or Aldus. Homeliness is the expression by which his type and his illustrations are best described. The idea that he could have any call to vie with the grandeur of the German or the elegance of the Italian type evidently never occurred to him. With the latter, indeed, he could not compete, for he never uses the Roman character. Yet he was nice respecting his type, using no less than eight founts at various times, but he never once stumbles into beauty. Paper, just beginning to be manufactured in England, was imported by him from the Low Countries.

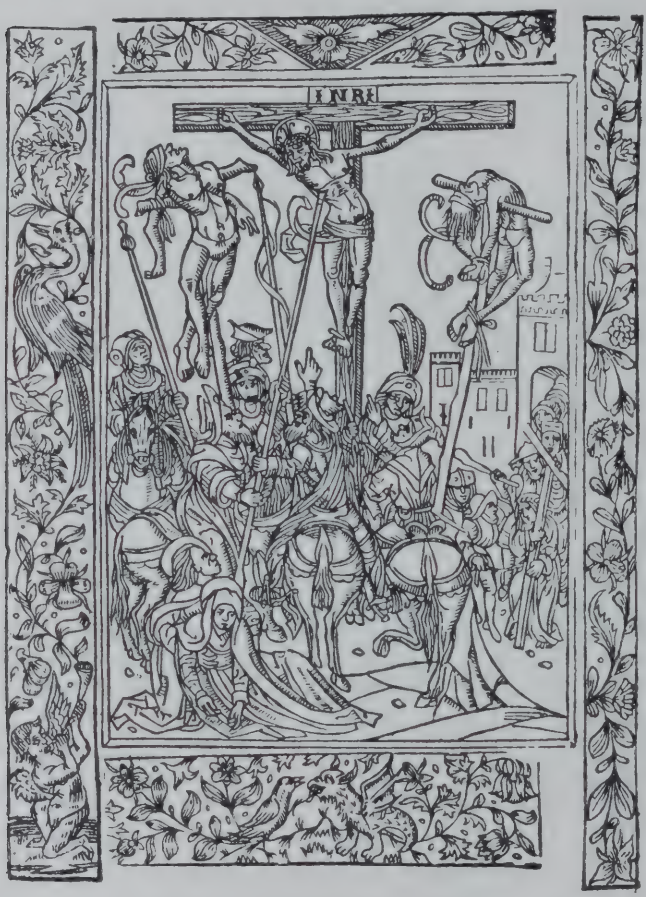
St. Jerome and his Lion

From the "Golden Legend," printed by Caxton in 1483

Caxton as translator

In one point of view Caxton's services to his country's literature cannot be overestimated; he poured new blood into its exhausted veins by the numerous translations which he executed with an industry almost incredible in one who personally superintended the mechanical part of his business, and was moreover continually engaged in commercial affairs. To appreciate the magnitude of his service we must consider that literary English prose was in Caxton's day almost extinct. The nation did indeed possess a monument of noble diction in Wycliffe's Bible, but this was proscribed and inaccessible. The other prose books of the fourteenth century had become obsolete through the mutation of

the times, and except for Malory, who himself owed his preservation to Caxton, the fifteenth century had done nothing to supply their place. Caxton could not write original books, but he could render books from other languages, and, so great was the dearth and penury of English letters at the time, that he was actually obliged to do so to keep his press going. Many of the French books he translated were romances, but others, such as the *Knight of the Tower's advice to his daughters*, *Cato*, and *The Doctrinal of Sapience*, were works of morality: and others, such as *Æsop*, were French versions of classical originals. Caxton, nevertheless, was not unskilled in Latin; he used the original text as well as the French version when translating the *Golden Legend* of Jacobus de Voragine; and a translation by him of six books of the *Metamorphoses*, strangely left unprinted in our day, is extant in the Pepysian Library at Magdalen College, Cambridge. One book, *Reynard the Fox*, was translated by him from the Dutch or Flemish, with which residence in the Low Countries had made him acquainted. The general character of his publications is proof that he wrought for a cultivated society, a genuine, though limited reading public. He speaks of many copies of his Chaucer being bought by "gentlemen." Professional literature is hardly represented; there are no legal books, and but one medical: nor is there anything relating to agriculture, handicraft, the fine arts, or military affairs.



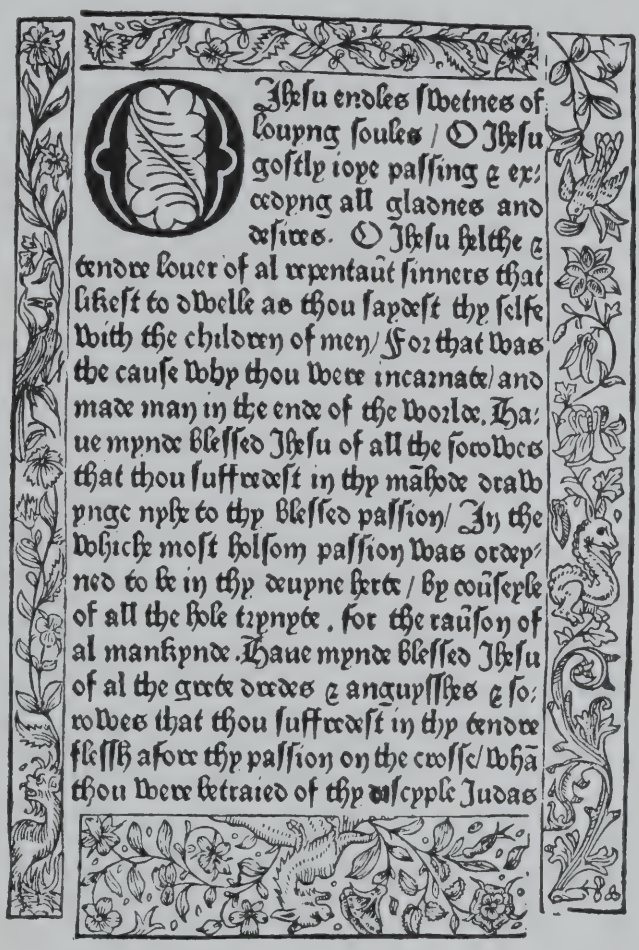
From the "XV. O's," circa 1491

The fifteen prayers, so called from the fact of their all commencing with the letter O

Of Caxton's one hundred and two publications thirty-eight exist only in a fragmentary condition. Several, no doubt, have entirely perished. Those extant books contain more than fourteen thousand pages, usually of folio size. When the amount of translation is also taken into account, this manifests a

prodigious industry sustained for fourteen years. The little we know of Caxton personally seems to indicate that he was in addition an active member of society, well esteemed by his fellow citizens. At one time he audited the parochial accounts. He died at some uncertain date in 1491, and was interred in St. Margaret's, Westminster, where his memory is honoured with a tablet and a stained glass window.

Caxton as author and critic


O Jhesu endles ſweetnes of loupng ſoules / O Jheſu goſtly ioye paſſing & exceedyng all gladnes and deſires. O Jheſu helthe & tendre louer of al repentaũt ſinners that liſteſt to dwelle as thou ſaydeſt thy ſelfe with the children of men / For that was the cauſe why thou were incarnate / and made man in the ende of the worlde. Haue myndre bleſſed Jheſu of all the ſorowes that thou ſuffredeſt in thy mãhode drawynge nyghe to thy bleſſed paſſion / In the whiche moſt holſom paſſion was ordeyned to be in thy doupne herte / by coũſeyle of all the hole tryntye. for the raũſon of al mankynde. Haue myndre bleſſed Jheſu of al the grete dredes & angupſſhes & ſorowes that thou ſuffredeſt in thy tendre fleſſh afore thy paſſion on the crooſſe / whã thou were betraied of thy diſcyple Judas

From the "XV. O's," circa 1491

The fifteen prayers, so called from the fact of their all commencing with the letter O

Caxton's literary gifts were not inconsiderable. His experience of life, both as merchant and courtier, had been of a nature to enlarge his mind, and endow him with fluency of expression and ease of manner. These qualities are apparent when he speaks for himself, as in his prefaces. As a translator he did much to enrich the language, something also to alloy it by an over liberal employment of French words and idioms, hardly to be avoided under his circumstances. He did not pique himself upon fidelity to his original, nor was it requisite that he should, as he was not dealing with masterpieces, and had neither the ambition nor the capacity to produce a monument of fine English like Lord Berners' Froissart. He frequently paraphrases and interpolates, but his versions are not really the worse. That he could appreciate the literary rank of a great writer is shown by his enthusiastic praise of Chaucer which we are about to quote; even though, except by the slight references to "metre" (stanzas) and "rhyme" (heroic couplets), it would hardly have been discovered that he was speaking of a poet. Of Chaucer's services to the language he writes much as a critic of the eighteenth century might have written about Dryden. When his orthography is

After dyuerſe werkes made/ tranſlated and achieued/ ha
uyng noo werkie in hande. I ſittyng in my ſtudye where as
laye many dyuerſe paunflettis and bookys. happened that
to my hande cam a lytyl booke in frenſhe. whiche late was
tranſlated oute of latyn by ſome noble clerke of frauce whi
che booke is named Eneydos/ made in latyn by that noble
poete & grete clerke Vyrgyle/ whiche booke I ſalwe ouer and
redde therin. Holw after the generall deſtruccyon of the gre
te Troye, Eneas departed berynge his olde fader anchiſes
vpon his ſholdres/his lityl ſon yolus on his honde. his wy
fe wyth moche other people folowynge/and holw he ſhypped
and departed wyth alle thyſtorye of his aduentures that he
had er he cam to the achieuement of his conqueſt of ytalye
as all a longe ſhall be ſhewed in this preſent booke. In whi
che booke I had grete playſyr. by cauſe of the fayr and hone
ſt termes & wordes in frenſhe/ Whyche I neuer ſalwe to fo
re lyke. ne none ſo playſaunt ne ſo wel ordred. whiche boo
ke as me ſemed ſholde be moche requyſyte to noble men to ſee
as wel for the eloquence as the hiſtorye/ Holw wel that
many honderd yerys paſſed was the ſayd booke of eneydos
wyth other werkes made and lerned dayly in ſcolis ſpecyal
ly in ytalye & other places/ whiche hiſtorye the ſayd Vyrgyle
made in metre/ And whan I had aduyſed me in this ſayd bo
ke. I delybered and concluded to tranſlate it in to englyſſhe
And forthwyth toke a penne & ynke and wrote a leef or
tweyne /whyche I ouerſalwe agayn to correcte it/ And whā
I ſalwe the fayr & ſtraunge termes therin/ I doubted that it
ſholde not pleaſe ſome gentylmen whiche late blamed me
ſayeng ỹ in my tranſlacyons I had ouer curyous termes
whiche coude not be vnderſtande of comyn vpple/ and deſired
me to vſe olde and homely termes in my tranſlacyons. and

A Page from "The Boke of Eneydos," printed by Caxton in 1490

modernised it will be seen how nearly he approaches the standard English of our day :

> Great thanks, laud, and honour ought to be given unto the clerks, poets, and historiographs, that have written many noble books of wisdom, of the lives, passions, and miracles, of holy saints, of histories of noble and famous acts and feats, and of the chronicles with the beginning of the creation of the world unto this present time, by which we be daily informed and have knowledge of many things of whom we should not have known if they had not left us their monuments written. Among whom and in especial to-fore all other we ought to give a singular laud unto that noble and great philosopher Geoffry Chaucer, the which for his ornate writing in our tongue may well have the name of a laureate poet. For to-fore that he by his labour embellished, ornated, and made fair our English, in this royame was had rude speech and incongrue, as yet it appeareth by old books, which at this day ought not to have place nor be compared among us to his beauteous volumes and adornate writings, of whom he made many books and treatises of many a noble history as well in metre as in rhyme and prose, and them so craftily made that he comprehended his matters in short, quick and high sentences, eschewing prolixity, casting away the chaff of superfluity, and showing the picked grain of sentence uttered by crafty and sugared eloquence. Of whom among all other of his books I purpose to imprint by the grace of God his *Tales of Canterbury*, in which I find many a noble history of every estate and degree, first rehearsing the conditions and the array of each of them as proper as possible is to be said, and after these tales, which be of noblesse, wisdom, gentleness, mirth, and also of very holiness and virtue, wherein he finisheth this said book, which book I have diligently overseen and duly examined to the end that it be made according to his own making. For I find many of the said books which writers have abridged and many things left out ; and in some places have set certain verses that he never made nor set in his book, of which books so incorrect was one brought to me six years passed which I supposed had been very true and correct. And according to the same I did to imprint a certain number of them, which anon were sold to many and divers gentlemen, of whom one gentleman came to me and said that this book was not according in many places to the book Geoffry Chaucer had made. To whom I answered that I had made it according to my copy, and that by me was nothing added or minished. Then he said he knew a book which his father had and much loved, that was very true and according to his [Chaucer's] own first book by him made, and said more, if I would imprint it again he would get me the same book for a copy, howbeit he wist well that his father would not gladly depart from it.

Caxton proceeds to describe how, the more correct manuscript being courteously placed at his disposition by the gentleman's father, he amended his former edition by its aid. The probable date of this edition is 1478, and that of the improved one 1484. The episode shows how faulty MSS. were becoming when printing appeared to stop further degeneracy, but also in some cases to perpetuate errors already existing. He was succeeded by his apprentice, Wynkyn de Worde, and Richard Pynson about the same time took up the business of his rival, William de Machlinia. We part from him with the remark that in his day literature was first officially recognised as a meet subject for encouragement by Government by a proclamation of Richard the Third repealing duties on the importation of books, and allowing them to be sold in England by foreign booksellers.

CHAPTER IX

THE LITERATURE OF SCOTLAND TO THE END OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY—THE BALLAD

Scotch and ballad literature

WE have now arrived at the brink of the great revival of literature which has continued to our own times. The chief barrier between writer and reader has been broken down by the invention of printing, and henceforth the stream of literary production is to be continuous, and literature is to acquire more and more influence as an agency in the affairs of the world. Hitherto, as we have had ample opportunity of observing, the course of literature has been liable to such interruptions as to render it difficult of treatment as a whole: but henceforth every people with pretensions to civilisation has a continuous literary history. The wish to preserve as much continuity as possible in the record of British literature has induced us to reserve for special treatment two departments clearly demarcated from the rest of the subject. These are the literature of Scotland and ballad literature, both originating and attaining a considerable development before the introduction of printing, and therefore to be dealt with ere we trace the consequences of the greatest intellectual revolution hitherto effected by a material process. This parenthesis involves no considerable retrogression in our narrative, as literature hardly existed in Scotland before Barbour in the middle of the fourteenth century: and the ballad, though already on the lips of the people, rarely enlisted the pen of the scribe until an even later date.

English and Scotch nationality virtually identical

Before entering upon the history of Scottish literature, it may be necessary to remove some misconceptions. We are accustomed to regard the Scotland prior to the accession of James I. as a foreign country, but in fact, however politically estranged, the Lowland Scotch, with whose literature alone we are concerned, were in blood and character as English as any of the dwellers to the south of the Tweed. There was indeed a large Celtic admixture in the Western Lowlands, where British chieftains had for a considerable period maintained their independence, but this has for centuries ceased to be recognisable. The Anglian colonisation of the Eastern Lowlands is manifested by the fact that the Scottish metropolis itself bears the name (Edwin's burgh) given to it by the Northumbrian monarch who made it his capital in the seventh century. At subsequent periods, indeed, the Eastern Lowlands were conquered, now by Celts, now by Danes, but the close resemblance of the Northumbrian dialect to the Scotch shows how slightly the composition of the population was affected by these political changes. "The Danes chose

Deira, not Bernicia; their traces are found in Yorkshire, not in Northumberland." Cumberland for a long time belonged to Scotland, the English Kings did not finally renounce their claims upon the Lothians until 1016, but neither the linguistic nor the ethnological character of the districts was affected except by the absorption of the Celtic element. Meanwhile a powerful Celtic monarchy was growing up in central Scotland, formed by the fusion of the Picts, an ancient people of uncertain extraction, but entirely Celticised, with the Scoti or immigrants from Scotia, *i.e.*, Ireland. But the monarch under whom this kingdom was finally consolidated, Malcolm Canmore, was half an Englishman in virtue of his mother; his queen, a princess of the royal family of Hungary, was half Saxon a so; and ere long a succession of matrimonial alliances made his successors Anglo-Normans. When, at the beginning of the twelfth century, King Edgar made Edinburgh his capital, the Celtic element retired definitively into the background. The institutions of the kingdom became substantially Anglo-Norman; and, except in the illiterate Highlands, Saxon speech prevailed so thoroughly that the Scotch poets describe their language as "English." The first author who professed to write "Scottish" was Gavin Douglas, under the influence of the anti-English feeling generated by the disaster of Flodden Field.

Slow progress of Scotch literature

The slow literary progress of Scotland in comparison with England is solely attributable to external causes—the poor and unpeopled condition of the country, the perpetual feuds, foreign and intestine, and the absence of any foundation for a literary superstructure. England possessed a national literature before the Conquest, which although almost obliterated was capable of revival: she also had an imported literature which for long supplied its place, and by which, when the time for fusion came, it was enormously enriched. Scotland had no ancient indigenous literature for modern writers to develop, and no imported literature to rouse the emulation and stimulate the ambition of her own children. The themes of her poets were frequently national, but their execution and even their language were English. The best of them continually remind us of Chaucer, but not until near the close of the fifteenth century do they seem in any measure to prefigure Burns or Scott. No one thought of attempting prose literature. Scotland in the thirteenth century produced powerful minds in Michael Scott and Duns Scotus, but they wrote in Latin on subjects infinitely remote from the comprehension of ordinary readers. No one seemed to have an idea that the ordinary speech could be fit for anything beyond the transaction of the ordinary affairs of life.

Thomas the Rhymer

Many, perhaps most, ancient literatures claim a patriarchal founder, who from some points of view wears the semblance of a fable and from others that of a fact. Scotland has her Orpheus or Linus in THOMAS of ERCILDOUNE, called also THOMAS the RHYMER, who does not indeed precede her Ennius, John Barbour, by any immense interval of time, but is still sufficiently in advance of him to fulfil the requisites of a venerable ancestor, could we but be sure that he was indeed an author. His actual existence is unquestionable. Ercildoune

or Earlston is a village in Berwickshire, and ancient parchments demonstrate that two Thomases, father and son, dwelt there as landowners in the thirteenth century. The tradition of poetry appears to attach to the elder, whose appellation of "Thomas the Rhymer" might seem decisive on the point if, by a strange coincidence, "Rhymer" were not also another form of "Rymour," a surname then common in Berwickshire. His claim to the gift of prophecy, the most exalted attribute of the *vates sacer*, is shown to have really existed in the popular estimation by the circumstantial account of his prediction, which should perhaps rather be regarded as an instance of second sight, of the death of Alexander III. in 1285. He is also the subject of fairy legends, to be subsequently adverted to, and is named as a poet and author of a romance on the story of Tristrem in Robert Mannyng's metrical English Chronicle, composed in 1338. Mannyng's testimony is very clear. He says, complaining of the corruption of poetical texts by the minstrels :

I see in song, in sedgeyng[1] tale
Of Erceldoun and of Kendale[2]
None them says as they them wrought,
And in their saying it seems nought.
That may thou hear in Sir Tristrem
Over gestes it has the steem[3]
Over all that is or was,
If men it said as made Thomas.
But I hear it no man so say,
That of some couple some is away :
So their fair saying here beforn
Is their travail near forlorn.

Mannyng, then, writing fifty or sixty years after Thomas of Ercildoune, affirms him to have been the author of a poem on Tristrem, sufficiently popular to be habitually in the mouths of minstrels and reciters. This is a strong testimony. It is thought to be invalidated by the fact that Gottfried of Strasburg, writing his standard poem on the Tristrem story nearly a century before Thomas of Ercildoune, declares himself indebted for it to another Thomas, Thomas of Brittany, whom chronology forbids us to identify with the Rhymer. But it is by no means clear that Thomas of Brittany was a poet. Internal evidence proves Gottfried's poem to be derived from a French version, which may have been a translation from a poem by this Breton Thomas, but is just as likely to have been merely based upon traditions transmitted by him. He is not mentioned elsewhere, and we are inclined to identify him with a Welsh Thomas of the eleventh or twelfth century, the Thomas ab Einion Offeiriadd who is recorded to have collected, not invented or versified, the traditions relating to Taliesin. He probably did not rest there, and if he put together the story of Tristrem, and his redaction passed into Brittany, he may well have been the common source drawn upon by

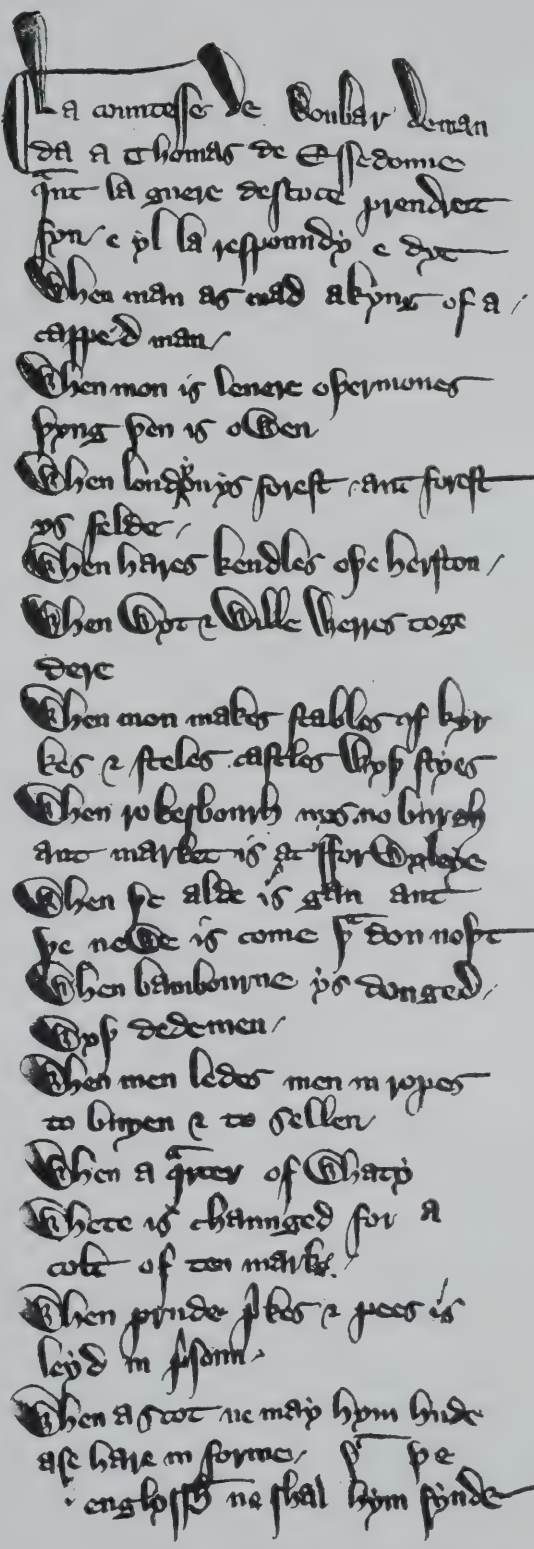
[1] Saying, narrative.

[2] "Kendale" does not seem to be mentioned elsewhere as a poet ; perhaps he is to be identified with Richard Kendall, a writer on music of uncertain date, who is said to have been a monk of Sherborne.

[3] Esteem

both the German and the Scotch poet. Mannyng, it is evident, has no knowledge of any Thomas connected with the Tristrem story other than Thomas of Ercildoune, or any doubt that Thomas was a Scotchman. If so, he may rank as the venerable father of Scotch poetry, since although the original Scotch text may have disappeared, the crabbed dialect of Northumbrian English in which the poem exists is hardly distinguishable from Scotch. In fact, however, it is not always easy to determine on which side of the border an ancient poem was written: and it can only be affirmed that the dialect of "Tristrem" as we have it is Northumbrian, very probably in the transcript of a more southern scribe, and that it was composed in the latter half of the thirteenth century.

Personally, Thomas of Ercildoune might well sustain the character of the patriarch of Scottish poetry, for he appears not merely in history as a prophet, but in legend as the companion of beings of another world. A metrical romance composed in his name more than a century after his death represents him as the



The Prophecy of Thomas of Ercildoune to the Countess of Dunbar in answer to her question as to the ending of the Scotch War

British Museum, Harl. MS. 2253

The legendary Thomas

favoured lover of the Queen of Fairy, as residing with her for three years in her enchanted realm, and as at length dismissed to earth lest he should be appropriated by the fiend, who is about to make his triennial visitation of Elfland, exactly like a bishop. As a parting gift the Fairy Queen endows him with the faculty of prophecy, which he turns to account by predicting a series of events in Scottish history some considerable time after they have taken place. These predictions are probably from the same hand as the romance, which claims to be founded upon an earlier poem in Scottish, being itself in a North English dialect. If, as is supposed, this original poem ended with the return of Thomas to Fairie, it cannot have been written by him, but no doubt embodies a genuine tradition respecting him, for which there are many precedents in legendary literature. Tales of heroes enjoying the favours of nymphs, and of persons endowed by supernatural beings with the gift of prophecy, go back to Calypso and Cassandra. It is to be regretted that the Fairy Queen omitted to endow Thomas with the gift of poetry, which would have done him more service with posterity. If, as we should wish to deem him, the premier poet of Scotland, his title to fame is purely chronological, for the poetical merit of his Tristrem is small, after every allowance for the transfusion into another dialect which it may have undergone. Its defects are not so much of language, as of insensibility to the beauty and significance of the story : the versification is not inharmonious, but the poet, unlike Gottfried of Strasburg, follows his original with matter of fact servility, and seems afraid of saying more than is set down for him : hence the strongest situations are slurred over and thrown away. The following stanza may serve as a specimen of the style :

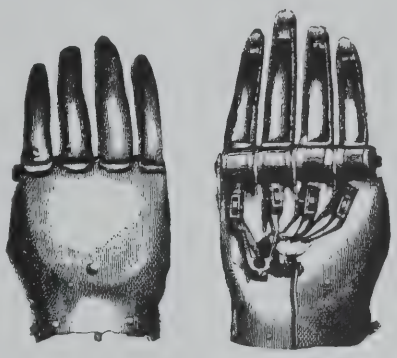
Tristrem tok his stede,
  And lepe ther on to ride ;
The Quen bad him her lede,
  To schip him beside ;
Tristrem did as she bede ;
  In wood he gan her hide ;
To th'erl he seyd in that nede ;
  " Thou hast ytent thy pride,
    Thou dote ;
With thine harp thou wonne her that tide,
  Thou tint[1] her with my rote."[2]

John Barbour

If the author of *Sir Tristrem* was an Englishman, primacy of Scotch song in point of date falls to one most worthy of the distinction, JOHN BARBOUR. He was probably born about 1316, and first appears in 1357 as enjoying the dignity of Archdeacon of Aberdeen. In that year he receives a safe conduct from the King of England to escort three scholars to Oxford, Scotland not then possessing any university of her own. In the same year he represents the Bishop of Aberdeen in a council held to consider the ways and means of ransoming the captive King David ; and in 1364, 1365, and 1368 he has further safe conducts, apparently connected with educational matters. In 1372, and

[1] Lost. [2] Lute.

at various subsequent periods, he is an auditor of the exchequer, where he would come into contact with another poet, Sir Hugh of Eglintoun, afterwards to be mentioned. In 1375 we first hear of his connection with literature, he having in that year, according to his own statement, composed the *Bruce*, the poem on the exploits of Robert Bruce which became one of the two mediæval national epics. Until lately this was supposed to be his sole contribution to poetry, and it would suffice for his fame. But in 1866 Henry Bradshaw found, blended with a manuscript of Lydgate's *Troy Book*, two fragments containing more than two thousand lines of a translation, previously unknown, of Guido de Columnis' history of the siege of Troy, attributed to Barbour in the MS., and undoubtedly his. A month or two later, the same acute and fortunate explorer recognised in a volume of metrical Lives of the Saints clear proofs of a Scotch origin, and sound reasons for attributing it to Barbour. The latter conclusion, at first unanimously accepted, has been recently impugned; but the resemblance in diction and metre between the Legends and the *Bruce*, leave, notwithstanding some minor discrepancies, little doubt that Bradshaw was right. The work declares itself, moreover, to be the work of an aged poet, and Barbour lived until 1395. Its principal source is the Golden Legend of Jacobus de Voragine. It consists of upwards of thirty-three thousand verses, and incidentally states that the author has also versified the Gospels and the Legends of the Virgin. These books are lost: but another epic of importance has been claimed for Barbour upon strong grounds. This is the translation of the French metrical romance of Alexander the Great printed about 1580 as an anonymous work, after a manuscript dating the composition in 1438. Mr. George Neilson first recognised the fact that this translation contains so many lines borrowed from Barbour's *Bruce*, and exhibits so much affinity to that poem in its rhymes and its mannerisms, as to prove that either Barbour possessed the most servile of imitators in the translator, or that he was the translator himself. There are obvious difficulties in the way of either hypothesis: yet one of them must be true, unless we can believe that, as has been suggested, the *Bruce* was rewritten towards the end of the fifteenth century with the aid of the *Alexander*. This would require us to admit that the adulterated version entirely effaced the genuine one, which seems hardly possible. Two arguments seem to us to speak for Barbour's authorship—the probability that the translator of the *Troy Book* would also translate the *Alexander;* and the improbability that a poet of such facility should have been so nearly silent until his production of the *Bruce* about the age of sixty. This is certainly not the wont of poets. The *Troy Book* and



The Steel Hand of Carslogie

The iron hand said to have been made by order of the Bruce for De Clephanes, who lost his left hand in one of Bruce's battles

the *Alexander* together would provide sufficient occupation, and not more than sufficient, for his poetical prime of life.

Barbour died on March 13, 1395, still holding his office as Archdeacon, and in the enjoyment of a pension, supposed to have been conferred as the reward of a poem on the genealogy of the house of Stuart, the new royal family of Scotland. It is now lost, but its existence and his authorship are attested by Wyntoun.

Barbour's "Bruce"

Perhaps the most salient quality of Barbour is his winning amiability. Though his theme requires him to slay multitudes upon paper, he is all sunshine and smiles. For a patriotic poet he is marvellously devoid of enmity or rancour against the Southron. It is true that the story he has to tell is one eminently adapted to inspire a Scotchman with good humour; yet even so the absence of vindictiveness or malevolence is surprising. His good nature and a touch of chivalric generosity dispose him to represent the enemy in the best light; it was well for Scotland that he was not called upon to be her Tyrtaeus, but that the easier task devolved upon him of celebrating her victories after the storm of battle had rolled by. It cannot be said that he manifests any lack of interest in his theme, he is proud of his hero; but the register of his hero's deeds is less like an epic than an inventory. Barbour takes things as they come, and makes no attempt to mould them into artistic symmetry. His principal talent is for description, in which he often excels. Innocent as he was of Homer, it is interesting to note how, like Homer, he was attracted by the flash of bared weapons and burnished armour :—

Dunfermline Abbey, the burial-place of Robert the Bruce

"They haue hym had to Dunfermlyne
And hym solemynly erdit syne."

Sir Aymer, on the tother party,
Gathered so great a chivalry,
That he might be three thousand ner,
Armed and dight in good maner;
That, as a man of great noblay,
He held toward his tryst his way.
When the set day comen was,
He sped him fast toward the place
That he nemmyt for to fight.
The sun was risen shining bright,
That schauit on the scheldis brade.

In twa exchelis[1] ordanyt he had,
The folk that he had in leading
The King, while soon in the morning
Saw first coming their first exchele,
Arrayit sarraly[2] and well;
And at their back, some dele ner hand,
He saw the tother followand
Their bassines burnyst all bright,
Against the sun gleaming of light;
Their speris, pennon and their shields,
Of light illumined all the fields
There best[3] and browdyn[4] wer bright baneris,
And horses hewyt on ser[5] maneris;
And coat armoris of ser colouris,
And hauberks that were bright as fleuris,
Made them gletirand, as they war lik
Till angels high of heavens ryk.

Many such little pieces of description relieve the monotony of the continual fighting, and the amiable poet is evidently well pleased when he can contrive to bring in the sun, or birds, or flowers. In one place he diversifies his narrative with a little disquisition on astrology and necromancy, evincing much good sense. In another Douglas is represented as enforcing a particular course of action by an apologue of a fox:

A fisher whilom lay
Beside a river, for to get
His nettis that he had there set.
A little lodge thereby he made;
And there within a bed he had;
And a little fire also.
A door there was from outen mo,
Aright his nettis for to see,
He rose; and there well long dwelt he,
And, when he had done his deed,
Towart his lodge agayn he yeid,
And, with light of the little fire
That in the lodge was brennand schyr,
In till his lodge a fox he saw
That fast on ane salmound gar gnaw,
Than till the door he went in by,
And said, "Reiver, thou mon herout."
The fox, that was in full great doubt,
Lookèd about some hole to see;
But none escher[6] perceive could he,
But where the man stood sturdily,
A lauchtand[7] mantle ther him by,
Lying upon the bed, he saw;
And with his teeth he gan it draw
Out on the fire: and when the man
Saw his mantill lie brennand than
To red[8] it he ran hastily.

[1] Troops. [2] Compactly. [3] Fluttering. [4] Embroidered.
[5] Varied. [6] Issue. [7] Cloth. [8] Save.

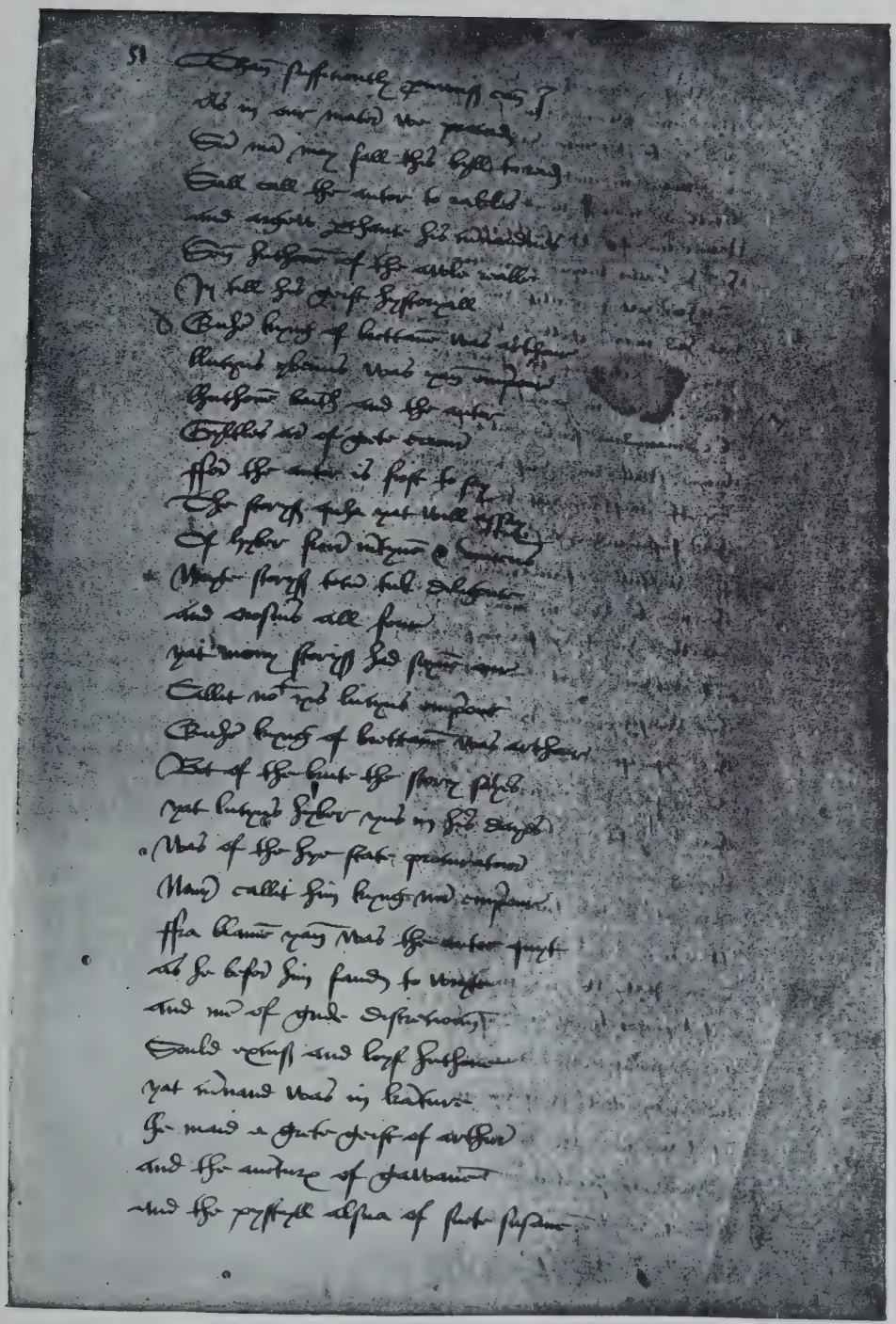
The fox gat out then in great hy ;[1]
And held his way his warend[2] till.
The man leyt[3] him begylet ill,
That he his good salmound had tynt,
And also had his mantle brint.

Barbour is manifestly an adept at telling a plain story in plain words. The germ of Scott's metrical romances is in his *Bruce*, but on comparing the execution we perceive not merely the difference in genius between the poets, but the advance in the culture and the demands of readers. The *Bruce* is the most veracious of epics; the poet has manifestly good authority for every incident, and could, if called upon, give chapter and verse for every line. So matter of fact a treatment would be intolerable in modern days. *The Legends of the Saints* is precisely in the manner of the *Bruce*, and if it be not Barbour's must proceed from some very close imitator. If, as we believe, it is his, it is of interest as showing that he had sufficient mental flexibility to interest himself in a great variety of subjects, and that his poetical output was not limited to descriptions of battles. No kind of incident comes amiss to him, and he always does his subject justice, and no more. *Par negotiis neque supra.* The translated romances of *Troy* and *Alexander* equally illustrate his fluency, his businesslike method of procedure, and his patience.

Huchown of the Awle Ryale

We now arrive at a literary problem of considerable difficulty, the authorship of the various poems which have been attributed to HUCHOWN OF THE AWLE RYALE (*Aula Regia*), and the identity of this person. Dunbar, in his *Lament for the Makaris*, mentions "the gude SIR HEW OF EGLINTOUN," as a deceased Scottish poet. There is no further account of him under this appellation, but Andrew Wyntoun, about 1420, speaks of *Huchown* (Hughie) as the author of *The Great Gest of Arthure*, *The Awntires of Gawane*, and *The Pystill of Swete Susan*. The last named poem is extant under this title, and the other two have been plausibly identified with *The Morte Arthure* and *The Awntires of Arthure*, alliterative romances which, as well as the *Pystill*, have been printed. There are difficulties in the way: Eglintoun's life, so far as known to us, scarcely seems that of a poet. He was brother-in-law to Robert the Steward, afterwards King of Scotland; was in his youth made prisoner in an unfortunate foray into England; was afterwards employed on important missions to England and France, became an auditor of the exchequer, and died in 1376 or 1377 in high favour with King Robert. It is strange that such a cloud of obscurity should rest upon the works of one so eminently placed; it is certain, nevertheless, that Sir Hugh did write poetry, and that if the *Huchown* poems are not his, his works are not only obscure but irrecoverable. It is further certain that the poet mentioned by Wyntoun was a Scotchman, which disarms the objection, at first sight so formidable, that the poems are not in the Scottish dialect, and exhibit no trace of Scotch feeling. Endeavours, however, have been made to claim a much more extensive and important activity for Huchown, attributing to him *Sir Gawain* and *The Green Knight*,

[1] Haste. [2] Earth [3] Reckoned.



A page from Wyntoun's "Chronicle of Scotland" (circa 1420), concerning "Huchown of the Awle Ryale" and his "Great Gest of Arthure"

From a MS. in the possession of Mr. J. Ferguson of Duns

The Pearl and its companion pieces, alliterative translations of the French metrical romances of *Troy* and *Alexander*, and other poems. Mr. George Neilson, the spirited and ingenious advocate of this view, has indeed shown that passages from *Gawain* and *Titus and Vespasian*, and from the translations which occur with such frequency in the anonymous poem entitled *The Parliament of the Three Ages* as to justify the belief that the same poet was the author of all the five pieces. To prove his identity with *Huchown*, however, it must be shown that he was also the author of the poems attributed to this writer by Wyntoun; and although Mr. Neilson adduces parallel passages from the *Mort Arthure* in support of his case, they seem to us insufficient to establish it: so that evidence is least forthcoming where it is most wanted. The problem is still far from a solution. The general resemblance of all the poems in alliterative verse that have been claimed for *Huchown* is unquestionable, but it is a fair subject for enquiry how far this may be due to the identity of metre. It might be difficult to distinguish at the present day between the work of two good poets writing on kindred themes in the metre of *In Memoriam*. For the present, perhaps, it may be safest to ascribe the poems mentioned by Wyntoun to Sir Hugh of Eglintoun; *Gawain*, the *Parliament*, *Vespasian* and the translations to an unknown writer; and *Pearl* and its satellites to yet another, though there is no great improbability in their proceeding from the author of Gawain. Of the remaining poems of the *Huchown* group *Wynners and Wastours* may be by him. *Golagros and Gawain* is generally ascribed to Clerk of Tranent, and *Erkenwald* is of quite uncertain authorship. The date of most falls between 1350 and 1375. All are written in some North of England dialect, and but for Wyntoun no one would have attributed any of them to a Scottish writer. The apparent adumbration of the institution of the Order of the Garter in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* renders it probable that the author lived at the court of Edward the Third, and is unfavourable to his Scottish origin. The composition is always respectable, but it is only in *Sir Gawain* and *Pearl* with its companions, all noticed in a preceding chapter, that the author or authors exhibit deep poetical feeling, while they evince much descriptive power, and are upborne throughout by a pervading dignity of expression, due in a measure to the crabbedness of their metre, which may be compared to a stiff brocaded suit difficult to put on or wear with grace, but which at all events constrains the wearer to hold himself erect. This, however, is very far from applying to *The Pistill of Susan*, a poem on the story of Susanna and the Elders, which, unfortunately for Sir Hugh of Eglintoun's claim to better poems, is the one of the three which may be most confidently attributed to him, the identification of the other two with any extant work of his being uncertain. It hardly seems the composition that might have been expected from the author of *Sir Gawain* or of *Pearl*.

Andrew Wyntoun

About 1422 ANDREW WYNTOUN, canon of St. Andrews, and Prior of St. Serfe, composed a metrical chronicle, to which he gave the title of original, because it began with the origin of the world. Happily he condescended to occupy himself principally with the affairs of Scotland, and as

ordinys that ar loff and dop
lyfftenyth and I ſhall yon tell
By old dayis what auntrys wop
Amongs onys oldys yat by fell
In Arthurs dayis that nobill kyng
By ſelle auntrys fopth ſold
And I ſhall talle of thos ondyng
That mykill wpth of wo and wold
The knyghtis of the table rownd
The ſangyarly whan thay had ſought
Auntrys that thay by fop them fownd
Affynſhid and to ende brought
Thor enemys thay bette in bond
Ffor gold or lyff thay lefte them nought
Ffamus yere thay lyvid ſownd
Whan thay had thoſe wythis wrought
Tills on atyme it by falle
The kyng in bed lay by the qwene
Off auntrys thay by game to talle
Any that in the land had bene
Or yff that it wop yonis wille
Of Alwerdis thyngis I wold yon mene
How yonr contis by tyrnyth to ſpille
Off doughty knyghtis all by dene
Eyr yonr hone by tyrnys to falle
That wont was wide in world to ſpredde
Off launcelott and of other all
That onyr ſo doughty wop in dede
Dame thoſe to thy counſell I calle
What wop best for ſuche anede

A page from the "Morte Arthure"
British Museum, Harl. MS. 2252

respects these his work is of considerable historical value. It has no poetical recommendation, except a manly strenuousness of expression. The author cannot invent or embellish, but a good story does not lose in his hands. His pithy style is well illustrated by his account of the vision of Macbeth:

A night he thought in his dreaming
That sitting he was beside the king
At a seat in hunting, so
In a leash he had grey-hounds two.
He thought while he was so sitting
He saw three women by ganging:
And those women well thought he
The weird sisters most like to be.
The first he heard say ganging by,
"Lo, yonder the Thane of Cromarty!"
The other woman said again,
"Of Moray yonder I see the Thane!"
The third then said, "I see the King!"
All this he heard in his dreaming.

Macbeth's crime does not prevent the poet from rendering him justice as good ruler:

Seventeen winters full regnand,
As King he was in till Scotland.
All his time was great plenty
Abounding both in land and sea.
He was in justice right lawful,
And to his lieges all awful.
When Leo X [IX] was Pope of Rome,
As pilgrim to the court he come;
And in his alms he sent silver
To all poor folk that had myster:[1]
And all time used he to work
Profitably for Holy Kirk.

James the First of Scotland

Nearly at the same time as Wyntoun wrote, the literature of Scotland, according at least to the general belief, was enriched with a much more important poem. Kings have frequently distinguished themselves in prose authorship, but have so rarely excelled in poetry that if JAMES THE FIRST OF SCOTLAND be indeed the author of *The Kingis Quair* (*Quire-book*) he may perhaps claim the second place in royal song after David. The interest of the poetry would be still further enhanced by the romantic circumstances of the monarch's life. Born in 1394, he was sent to France for his education in 1406, but his ship was taken by the English, then at war with Scotland, and he spent eighteen years in captivity in England, receiving however ample means of support and an excellent bringing up, and twice accompanying Henry V. in expeditions against France. He had become King of Scotland by his father's death shortly after his captivity, and his ambitious uncle, the Regent Albany, probably took no steps to hasten his return. In 1424, after the deaths of Albany and Henry V., James was ransomed, and returned to Scotland,

[1] Need.

bringing with him an English bride, daughter of the Earl of Somerset. His wooing is supposed to be the subject of *The Kingis Quair*, which, if his, cannot well be of later date. Upon his return he threw himself into public business, proved himself an efficient legislator by the number of excellent laws which he caused to be enacted, and a ruthless antagonist by the destruction of the disaffected house of Albany. Like all the able sovereigns of his age, he made it his principal object to beat down the great nobles by the aid of the petty barons, the people and the clergy. This policy was carried out with great success until the catastrophe which terminated his life in 1437, a tragedy made additionally memorable by the heroism of Catherine Douglas, and the grand ballad epic of Rossetti.

The ruins of St. Andrew's Cathedral
From Slezer's "Theatrum Scotiæ," 1693

James I. of Scotland
From "Inscriptiones Historicæ Regum Scotorum," 1602

"The Kingis Quair"

It is difficult absolutely to determine the authorship of *The Kingis Quair*, inasmuch as we lack sufficient materials for deciding whether James was or was not by poetic temperament and literary skill capable of the composition of so fine a work. A few private letters, a few characteristic anecdotes, might guide us, but these are not forthcoming. Though other poems have been published as the work of James, only one of them can be his; and this is too short and insignificant to afford any clue to the extent of his poetical powers. The subject, his romantic attachment in captivity to the lady who subsequently became his queen, is one upon which, supposing him endowed with the poetical gift, he might very well write, but which might also furnish an attractive theme for another poet. The authorship is most distinctly claimed for him, his captivity and imprisonment in England being related as actual experiences of the author's; but this only proves that the poem was intended

to pass for his. The internal evidence, however, alleged against the poem's authenticity seems very weak ; and the external testimony, though late, when it does come is clear and decided. It is certainly surprising that there should be no evidence of the existence of a poem of such merit by so illustrious an author for sixty years after the period at which, if genuine, it must have been written, and it would seem no unfair inference that it was composed by some later minstrel in the character of the King. Yet the fraud would hardly have been attempted if the King did not already enjoy the character of a poet, and nothing but *The Kingis Quair* appears upon which this character could be based. It may be added that the peculiar character of the diction, a mixture of the Northern and the Southern dialects, is such as might be expected from a Scotchman long resident in England. On the whole, the literary historian will at present see no sufficient reason for erasing King James's name from the roll of poets. If he was the author, it will be possible to concur with Professor Skeat in attributing to him the pseudo-Chaucerian second part of the *Romaunt of the Rose*, written in a very similar dialect.

Whoever the author, *The Kingis Quair* is a great advance upon all preceding Scotch poetry. The new departure, however, is in no respect national, but arises from the poet's subjection to English influences, and the affection for Chaucer and Gower which he acknowledges with touching warmth :

> Unto ympenis[1] of my maisteres dere,
> Gowere and Chaucere that on the steppès sat
> Of rhetorike, quhill they were living here,
> Superlative as poets laureate,
> In moraltye and eloquence ornate,
> I recommend my book in linès seven,
> And eke their souls unto the bliss of heaven.

The poem belongs, like Lydgate's better productions, and *The Flower and the Leaf*, to the Chaucerian school then flourishing, which may be compared to the Tennysonian school of our own age. Chaucer, like Tennyson, had set a pattern of excellence not to be rivalled without an entirely new departure, of which the unimaginative fifteenth century was incapable. Nor did the talent of the poets of the age, until we come to Henryson, in any way qualify them to emulate Chaucer's style in the later *Canterbury Tales ;* they consequently wrote in the manner of *Troylus and Cryseide*, and approved themselves, if not masters, very worthy scholars. Like *The Flower and the Leaf*, *The Kingis Quair* is a kind of allegorical vision, not unlike the nearly contemporary *Quadriregio* of the Italian poet Frezzi. The lover finds himself successively in the realms of Venus, Minerva and Fortune, but all ends well. It is a charming poem, elegant in diction, melodious in versification, inspired by true feeling, and full of beautiful descriptive passages, of which the following may serve as an example :

[1] Hymns.

Æneas Silvius (afterwards Pope Pius II.) before James I. of Scotland

After the picture by Pintoricchio

Now there was made fast by the tower's wall
A garden fair, and in the corners set
An arbour green, with wandis long and small
Railed about, and so with trëës set
Was all the place, and hawthorn hedges knet,
That lyfe was none walking there forby,
That might within scarce any wight espy.

So thick the bewys[1] and the levès green
Beschedit all the alleys that there were;
And middis every arbour might be seen
The sharpè swetè grenè junipere,
Growing so fair with branches here and there
That, as it seemed to a lyf without,
The bewys spread the arbour all about.

And on the smale grene tuftis[2] sat
The little swetè nightingale, and sang
So loud and clear, the ympnis[3] consecrat
Of Lufis use, now soft, now loud among,
That all the garden and the wallis rong
Right of their song, and on the copill[4] next
Of their sweet harmony, and lo the text:

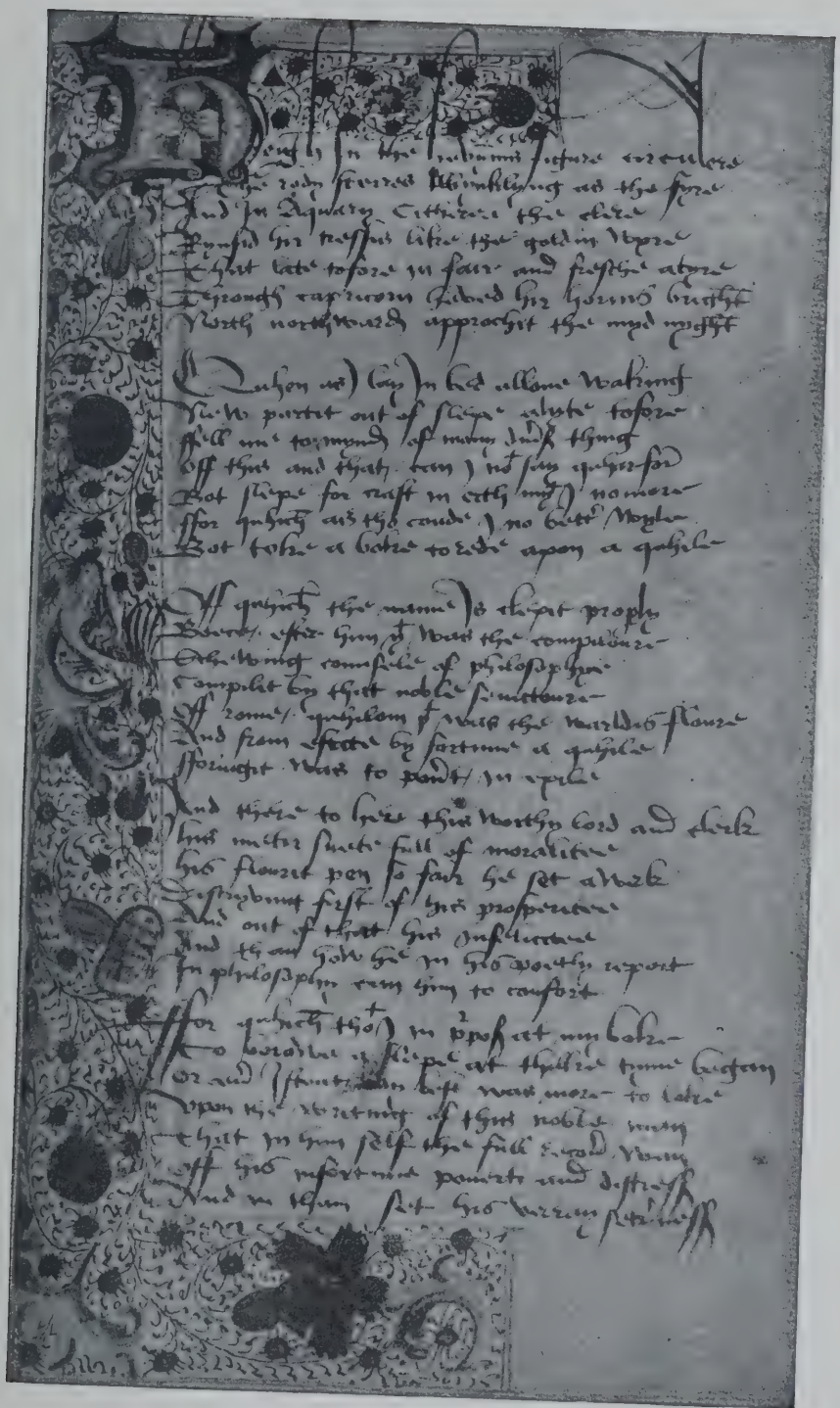
"Worship ye, that loveris bene, this May,
For of your bliss the kalends are begun,
And sing with us, away winter, away!
Come, summer, come, the sweet season and sun;
Awake for shame, that have your heavens won,
And amorously lift up your heades all,
Thank Love that list you to his merry call."

When they this song had sung a little thraw,
They stent awhile, and therewith unafraid
As I beheld and cast mine eyne a-lawe,
From bough to bough they hoppèd and they played,
And freshly in their birdis kinde arrayed
Their feathers new, and fret them on the sun,
And thankèd Love that had their matis won.

It is an additional argument in favour of James's authorship of *The Kingis Quair* that poetry flourished greatly during his reign.

How literary [says Mr. G. Neilson in *Scottish History and Art*, p. ix. 1902] the Court of King James was may be surmised not only from chronicles, but also from the probably correct ascription to his confessor David Rate [see Mr. J. T. T. Brown's article in the *Scottish Antiquary* for April 1897] of a variety of poems. The processes of identification are slender, yet in harmony with facts. What somewhat heightens the interest of this is a possible companion identification not hitherto advanced. Two obscure "makaris" named by Dunbar in his *Lament* were Roull of Aberdeen and Roull of Corstorphin. If the words "Quod Rate" imply that the poetic utterance was that of David Rate, confessor of King James, one of the Roulls may well have been Master Thomas Roull, clerk and chaplain of the same monarch. The propositions for a missing Christian name in each case are equally legitimate, although the proofs for each are equally incomplete. They are on the lines of the general fact that in the fifteenth century the official circles of the Court were literary. Among the "makaris" mourned by Dunbar, Quintin Schaw was a Court

[1] Boughs. [2] Twigs. [3] Hymns. [4] Couplet.

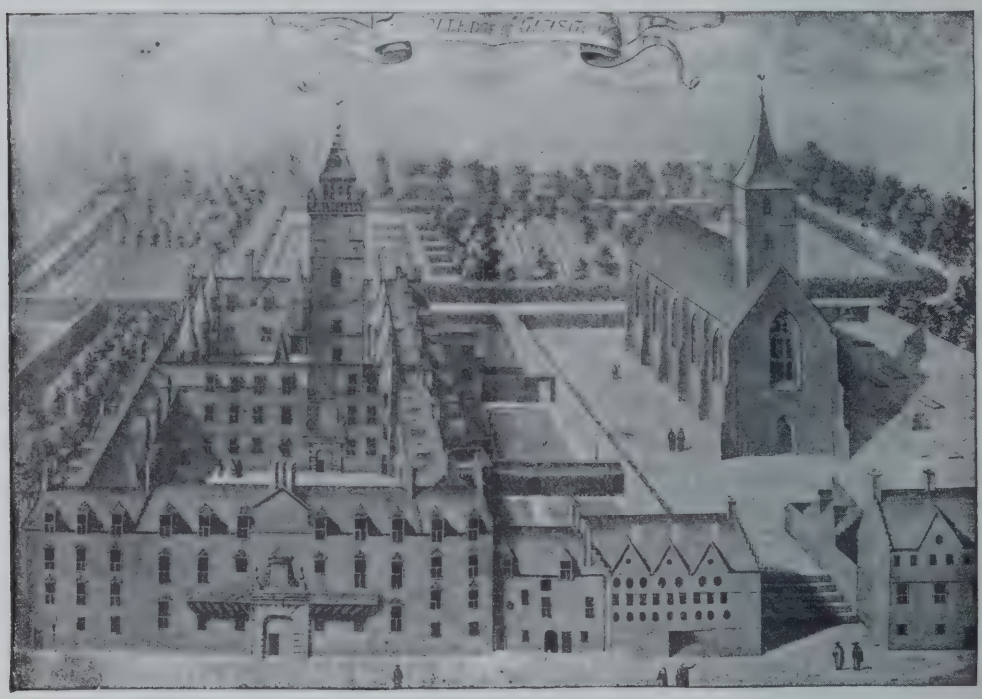


A page from the "Kingis Quair"

From the MS. in the Bodleian Library

dependent; Reid or "Stobo," was the clerk successively of James II. and James III.; and Patrick Johnstone was a Court player.

A hundred years passed away after the *Bruce* of Barbour, before the other great national hero of Scotland found a poet, but at last BLIND HARRY, or HENRY THE MINSTREL, arose to sing the deeds of William Wallace. Of Harry's life we know little more than what is told in the succeeding century by the historian Major, who informs us that he wrote during his, Major's, infancy, which would fall between 1470 and 1480. He adds that the minstrel collected the popular traditions respecting Wallace, and "by reciting them



Glasgow University

From Slezer's "Theatrum Scotiæ," 1693

before the nobles received food and clothing, of which he was worthy." He was, therefore, a rhapsodist, and Homeric in other particulars than his blindness, but treasury accounts show that he afterwards received a stipend from the King, which ceases in 1492. There is no doubt of his privation of sight, but the evidences of culture in his poems, including traces of Chaucer, indicate that before his affliction he must have employed his eyes in study. According to his own statement, indeed, his poem is mainly founded upon a Latin biography of Wallace, now lost, by his chaplain, John or Arnold Blair.

The Wallace epic

Blind Harry's theory and practice of poetry resemble Barbour's. Both may be described as pragmatical poets, they have a distinct notion of what they have to say, and set to work to impart it in a thoroughly business-like style, neither omitting anything that a prose historian would have regarded as

essential, nor inserting much that he would have deemed superfluous. The blind minstrel has the advantage of a superior poetical form in his heroic couplet, which tempts much less to diffuseness than Barbour's octosyllabics. On the other hand, Barbour is the better poet, with a more vivid gift of description, and occasional glimpses of fancy and feeling which rarely visit Blind Harry. The Wallace epic, nevertheless, from its very rudeness produces the deceptive impression of a more primitive composition, and, especially in the modernised version published early in the eighteenth century, has had a very powerful influence in fostering Scottish national feeling; but this is less due to the merit of the poet than to the surpassing interest and patriotic colouring of his story. Had this been rewritten in the following century by a poet of genius, the world would have had one great national epic the more.

A good example of Blind Harry's habitual manner, and his strong and weak points when grappling with a really stirring theme, is his treatment of the appalling legend of Fawdoun. Wallace has struck off Fawdoun's head for his treachery, and is spending the night in the lone tower of Gask, when a terrific blast upon the horn is heard outside. He sends his companions in successive pairs to investigate the cause, none return. At length he goes himself:

Syn forth he went where that he heard the horn.
Without the door Fawdoun was him beforn,
As till his sight, his own head in his hand;
A cross he made, when he saw him so stand
At Wallace in the head he swakit[1] there,
And he in haste soon hynt[2] it by the hair
Syne out again at him he couthit[3] cast;
In till his heart he was greatly aghast
Right well he trowit that was no spirit of man
It was some devil that sic malice began
He wyst no waill[4] there longer for to bide,
Up through the hall thus wight Wallace can glide
Till a close stair, the burdis raiff in twain
Fifteen foot large he leapt out of that inn.[5]
Up the watyr sodainely he couthe fare.
Again he blent[6] what perance[7] he saw there.
Him thought he saw Fawdoun that hugely sire;
That haill hall he had set into a fire;
A great rafter he had intill his hand.
Wallace as then no longer would he stand.

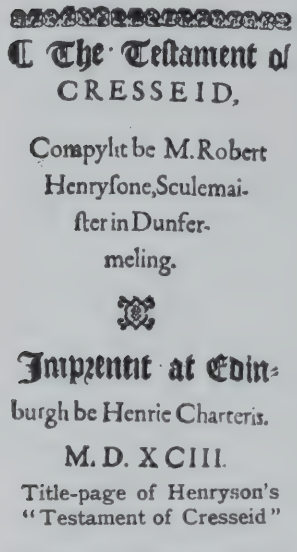
There are elements of grandeur in this description, but it is far inferior to the simple prose narrative of Sir Walter Scott in the notes to the *Lay of the Last Minstrel.*

Robert Henryson

Of the life of ROBERT HENRYSON, one of the best of the old Scotch poets, hardly anything is known beyond the fact that he was admitted a member of the University of Glasgow in 1462, being then possessed of degrees which he had probably gained at some foreign university. The piety and morality of

[1] Hurled. [2] Caught. [3] Did. [4] Choice. [5] House. [6] Peeped [7] Appearance.

his writings bespeak the clergyman. He would also seem to have been notary and schoolmaster ; and gives in general the impression of a man of parts and spirit, mingling freely with all classes of society. He is moreover an excellent poet. Although none of his poems may be quite on a level with *The Kingis Quair*, he surpasses his royal predecessor in versatility of theme and style. He has two special claims to distinction, as one of the best representatives of the Chaucerian school ; and as the first true lyrical poet that Scotland ever had, the precursor of the rich growth of popular song to come. The most important of his direct Chaucerian imitations are the poems on Orpheus and Eurydice, which he almost apologises for undertaking, " for in my life I could ne'er sing a note," and *The Testament of Cresseid*, the moving tale of Cressida's leprosy, which is told with much pathos. Of all the followers of Chaucer, Henryson is the only one who shows any ability to reproduce the Chaucerian humour. This is mainly evinced in his fables after Aesop ; which indeed, deficient as they are in terseness, rather anticipate the manner of La Fontaine than reproduce that of Aesop, but which, if regarded as easy familiar narratives, deserve the highest commendation. Their chief characteristic is humour, as when the fox makes his confession to the wolf :—


¶ The Teſtament of
CRESSEID,

Compylit be M. Robert
Henryſone, Sculemai-
ſter in Dunfer-
meling.

Imprentit at Edin-
burgh be Henrie Charteris.

M. D. XCIII.

Title-page of Henryson's "Testament of Cresseid"

Seeing the Wolf, the wily traitor Tod
On knëës fell, with head into his neck :
" Welcome, my father ghostliest under God,"
Quoth he, with many a linge and many a beck.
" Ha ! " quoth the Wolf, " Sir Tod, for what effek
Makye so feir ? ryse up, put on your weede,"
" Father," quoth he, " I have great cause to drede.

Ye are mirrour, lanterne, and sickerway
Should guide such simple folk as me to grace
Your bare feet, and your russet cowl of grey,
Your lean cheekës, your paill piteous face
Showis to me your perfect holiness,
For well were him that anis in his life
Had hap to you his sinnis for to shrive."

" Na, silly Laurence," quoth the Wolf, and leuch
" It pleases me that ye are penitent."
" Of reif[1] and sleuth,[2] Sir, I can tell aneuch,
That causes me full sair for to repent.
But Father, bide still here upon the bent,
I you beseech, and hear me to declare
My conscïence that prickis me so sair."

It appears, however, that the fox's principal motive for penitence is that " I

[1] Robbery. [2] Slaughter.

haif slane so few," which does not hinder his receiving absolution on condition of abstaining from animal food until Easter, except in case of great necessity, of which he is to be the judge. In the same spirit of sympathy with the wrongs of the poor, the Bear and the Badger are represented as trying a cause between the dog and the sheep, whose issue is a foregone conclusion, notwithstanding the painful zeal of the judges and their profound respect for precedent :—

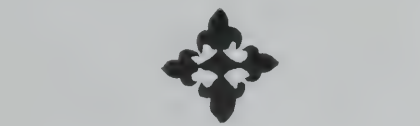
The Bear, the Brock, the matter took
in hand
For to decide if this exception
Was of no strength, or lawfully might
stand,
And thereupon, as judges, they sat
down
And held a long while disputation,
Seeking full many decretes of the law,
And glosses els, the verity to knaw.

This solemn but cutting irony is quite in the style of Krilov. *The Preaching of the Swallow* is in a higher strain, and in parts rises into eloquence.

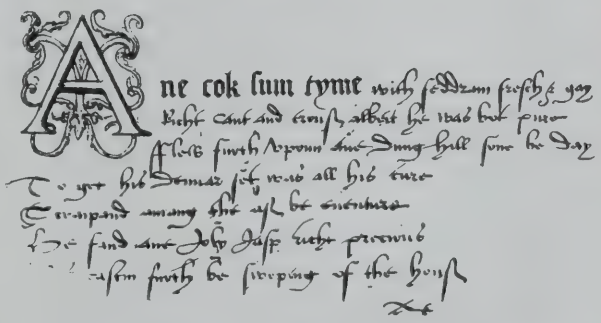
As a lyrist, apart even from the admirable feeling of his verses, Henryson claims high rank for his simple spontaneous melody. The following are the first two stanzas of *The Abbay Walk* :—

Alone as I went up and down
In ane Abbay was fair to see,
Thinking what consolation
Was best in to adversity ;
On caise[1] I cast on side myne eye,
And saw this written upon a wall
Of what estate man, that thou be,
Obey, and thank thy God of all.

Thy kingdom and thy great empire,
Thy royalty nor rich array
Shall not endure at thy desire,
But as the wind will wend away.



The taill of the Cok and the Jasp



"The Taill of the Cok and the Jasp." From a MS. of Henryson's Fables

British Museum, Harl. MS. 3865

Thy gold, and all thy gudès gay
When Fortune list will fra thee fall ;
Sin thou such samples sees each day :
Obey, and thank thy God of all.

Perhaps the most important of Henryson's performances is the lyrical pastoral of *Robin and Makyne*, not so much for its own merit, though this is great, than as the first revelation of the vast material for popular poetry

[1] Casually.

in Scotch rural life. It is the old story of cross purposes. Makyne loves Robin, Robin is indifferent. Makyne becomes desperate, lays open siege to him; Robin repels her. Makyne renounces him; Robin, piqued into love, strives to regain her, but only to discover that

> The man that will nocht whan he may,
> Sall have nocht quhen he wald.

The spirit and melody of the entire composition may be estimated by the last stanza :—

> Makyne went hame blyth anneuche
> Attour the holtis hair ;[1]
> Robene murnit, and Makyne leuch ;
> She sang, he sighëd sair :
> And so left him baith wo and wreuch[2]
> In dolour and in care,
> Keeping his hird under a huche[3]
> Amang the holtis hair.

Henryson is a Janus, who with one aspect looks back to Chaucer, and with the other forward to Burns and Allan Ramsay. In the latter respect he for long stands alone; otherwise there is no breach of continuity between him and the two important poets who immediately succeed, Gavin Douglas and William Dunbar. Having, however, arrived at the brink of the great transformation in literature about to be effected by the printing-press, we suspend the review of Scotch poetry in its purely literary form, and turn to the popular poetry which, both in Scotland and England, had been growing up side by side with it, and which took rank as an element in the literature of these countries towards the end of the fifteenth century.

James II. of Scotland
From "Inscriptiones Historicæ Regum Scotorum," 1602

About the period of our history at which we have arrived, the ballad begins to pass from the lips of the people into literature. *A Little Geste of Robin Hood* was printed by Wynkyn de Worde about 1495, but had no doubt been recited long before; and in general the fifteenth century may be regarded as the period when the ballad first took literary form. At the same time almost all the best examples are of later date, and it will not be possible to illustrate ballad poetry by such examples

[1] Across the grey hills. [2] Wretched. [3] Bank.

as the plan of our work requires without trespassing on the productions of a subsequent period. It seems best, nevertheless, to treat the general question of the origin of the ballad and its relation to other forms of poetry in this place, even though this should involve citations from the work of a later age, to whose productions an opportunity for recurring will be found.

The genesis of the ballad has of late been the subject of much controversy. For ages the question, as well as everything else connected with popular literature, was deemed unworthy of the attention of men of letters. Synesius tells us that in Africa he listened at night to the folk tales of the Libyan huntsmen, but he has not preserved a word of them. He was a good writer for his time, but all he wrote would now be deemed a cheap ransom for those neglected stories. By the mere force of reaction, the dry and prosaic eighteenth century first awoke to a perception of the charm and significance of popular song and legend. Men found in these the satisfaction of a need of which they had become conscious; but which, bound as they still were in the fetters of artificial diction and conventional modes of thought, they were not of themselves yet able to gratify. The revival which Percy and Warton inaugurated in England, and Herder and Bürger followed up in Germany, had been prefigured by the saying of Fletcher of Saltoun about the beginning of the century, "Let me make the songs of the people and I care not who makes their laws." The saying was perhaps not quite so wise as it seems, for the essential condition of worth in the songs of a people is that they should be made by the people, and if Fletcher of Saltoun had made them the virtue would have gone out of them. But it correctly expresses the general feeling of the eighteenth, and until a late period of the nineteenth, century, that popular songs and ballads must be conceived as the work of the people itself. Of late a reaction has set in against this view. "So far," says Mr. Courthope, "from the ballad being a spontaneous production of popular imagination, it was a type of poem adapted by

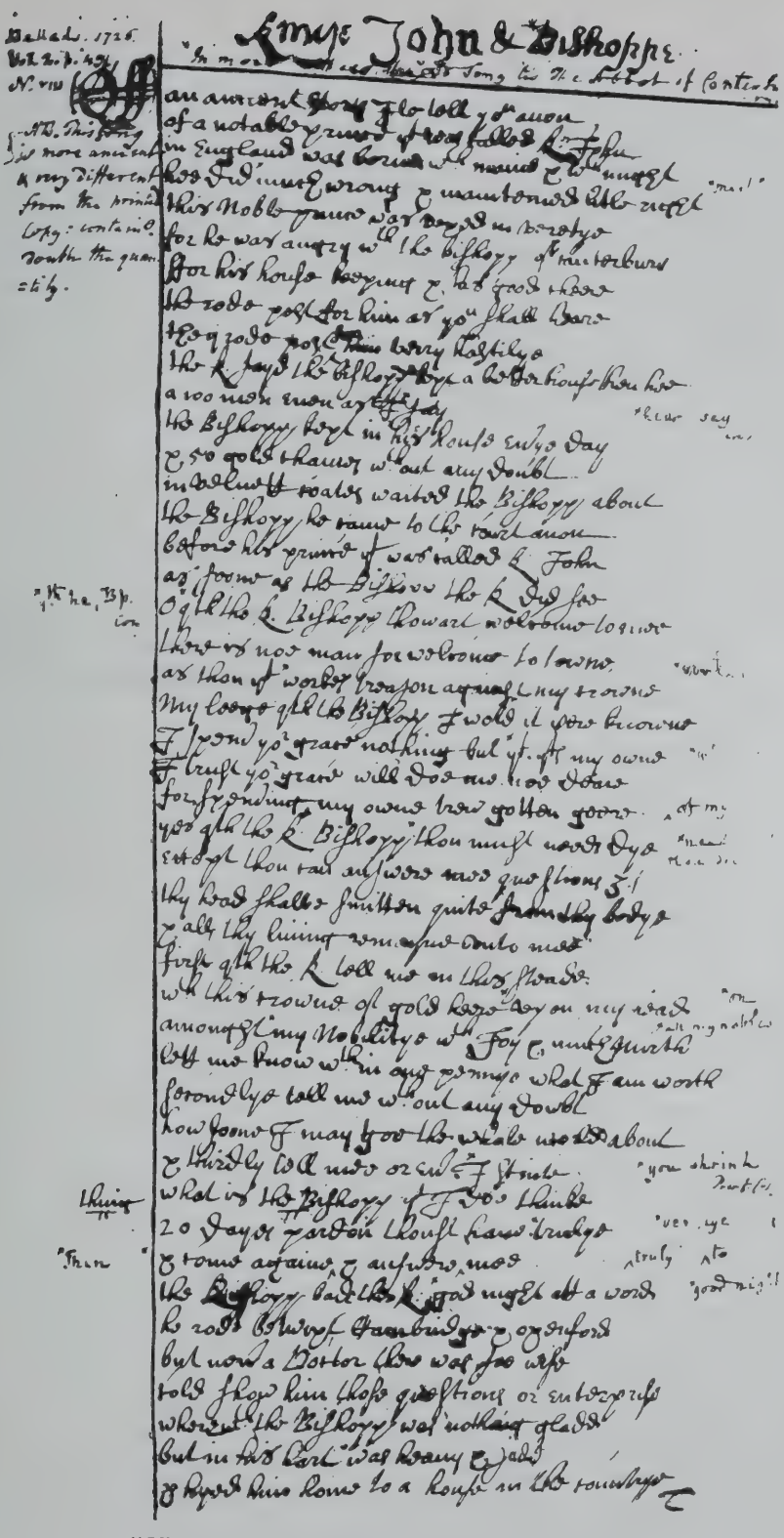
"A Lytell Geste of Robin Hode," printed by Wynkyn de Worde

From the copy in the University Library, Cambridge

the professors of the declining art of minstrelsy from the romances once in favour with the educated classes. Everything in the ballad—matter, form, composition—is the work of the minstrel ; all that the people do is to remember and repeat what the minstrel has put together." "The ballad," says Mr. Gregory Smith, "is not æsthetically a popular *genre*. It is a literary product both in matter and structure."

We shall best solve the problem of the genesis of the ballad poetry by a consideration of similar phenomena in other ages and countries. The result may be to convince us that the truth lies between the views of the eighteenth and those of the later nineteenth century. That the people can and does write poetry for itself is indisputable. We have the rude songs with which the Roman soldiers celebrated the triumphs of Cæsar and Aurelian, manifestly not the production of any court poet. The memory of Brian Boru's great victory over the Danes on St. Stephen's Day survives in Ireland in a carol about a wren, evidently not the composition of any professional minstrel. But there is nothing to prevent the poet from dignifying and embellishing what has come spontaneously to the lips of the common man ; and in so doing he affords material for future generations to deal with him in like manner. It is difficult to demonstrate the existence of popular ballads in their most primitive forms, as such rudimentary attempts are necessarily obliterated by the more refined versions. There are, however, many instances of the early forms of ballads, if not actually in the first stage, yet probably at but one or two removes from it. *The Abbot of Canterbury*, in the form now accepted, is a gem of humorous ballad narration ; the more primitive version in the *Percy Ballads* ("King John and the Bishop") is too uncouth to be read with any pleasure. Yet without this rude draft the masterpiece would not have existed ; and the draft supposes a pre-existing story, probably derived from a French *fabliau* based in its turn upon some venerable tradition. It would hence appear that the truth lies between the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theories of popular ballad poetry ; but that the eighteenth century was fully justified in attaching great importance to its discovery ; for, however the original ballads may have been worked over by succeeding poets, they did not on that account forfeit their native aroma or their originally popular character. The *Pervigilium Veneris* has all the air of an elaborate poem founded on the refrain of a ballad, but it is as well adapted for popular recitation as the original could have been. Peacock's "Bold Robin hath robed him in ghostly attire" is far superior in poetical merit to any of the old poems of the Robin Hood cycle, but it is not less a member of the cycle for that ; nor could it have been written save by a woodlander, one, like the "mountain maid" of his favourite Nonnus, ἐρημαδι σύντροφος ὑλῃ[1]. If, however, Robin Hood had not provided the matter, neither Peacock nor the earlier minstrels would have provided the verse. It is the chief error of Mr. Courthope and Mr. Gregory Smith to suppose that the minstrel originated the matter of the lay. Scarcely an instance can be produced where he did not work upon some tradition like Whittington's Cat, some

[1] "Twin-nurtured with the solitary wood."



"King John and Bishoppe." From the Percy folio

British Museum, Add. MSS. 27,879

contemporary occurrence like Flodden Field, or some old-world legend like "Glasgerion." The modern writers themselves emphasise this point by insisting on the ballad writers' obligations to the early metrical romances. This is true, but may be exaggerated. Several of the *Percy Ballads* really are romances, and not ballads at all. "The Boy and the Mantle," though seeming an adaptation of a romance, is probably a free version of a French *fabliau*. Yet many of the ballads may not unjustly be called the wreck of romances; but this does not necessarily involve literary degradation. The form may be less intricate, the spirit may be more truly poetical. We have a parallel instance in the hymns of the Greek lyrists, such as Stesichorus and Bacchylides, on divine and heroic legends, which were no doubt adapted from episodes in the works of their predecessors the Cyclic poets.

A ballade of the scottyshe kynge.
Kynge Jamp/Jomp pour. Jore is all go
pe sommoned our kynge why dyde sole
To pou no then: it dyde accorde
To sommon our kynge pour souerayne lorde

From John Skelton's "Balade of the Scottysshe Kynge," 1513

It should also be considered that many of the writers and rewriters of ballads, though setting to work with deliberate purpose, were in all probability not persons of culture, but men of the people. Mr. Yeats has made us acquainted with the itinerant Irish poets, men whose poetical gifts have almost gained them the reputation of wizards, but on the level of their uneducated countrymen in every other respect. There must have been many such among rude nations in all ages. There is another class, like the Lancashire and Dorsetshire schoolmaster, John Collier ("Tim Bobbin") and William Barnes, men of superior education, who designedly bring themselves down to the popular level, but who are not the less rustic poets because it would have been within their power to have adopted another style of composition. While admitting, therefore, that too little was made of the direct literary element in Percy's time, we are disposed to think that too much is made of it now; and, paradoxical as it may seem, to adopt in apparently reversing Mr. Lang's conclusion that "whoever made the ballads, the populace remade them." It rather appears to us that the ballads were made by the people and remade by

the poets; but, put it which way we will, the people remains the chief poet, while it must be admitted that the best poems are generally those in which men of culture have had the largest share.

Antiquarianism cannot well exist without antiquity, and, though it is great matter for regret, it is small matter for wonder that little literary interest was taken in our ancient ballads until the popular interest had become almost extinct. Some unknown person, probably in the reign of Charles I., thought enough of them to transcribe a great number into a folio volume; and this volume, found by Thomas Percy in a bureau in a house at Shiffnal, about the middle of the eighteenth century, has alone stood between us and the loss of much of our ballad literature. How much may have perished it is impossible to say. Much of this literature, even by the time of the invention of printing, had become too much out of date to be perpetuated by the press in an age devoid of the antiquarian sentiment; and tokens are not wanting that most of even the printed fugitive literature has perished. The speeches of Autolycus in the *Winter's Tale* show that in Shakespeare's time single-sheet ballads were a common article of traffic at fairs, and when the number of fairs is considered it is clear that the proportion preserved in the Roxburghe and similar collections, covering long periods as these do, can be but infinitesimal. In the reign of Elizabeth, the Spanish ambassador tells his master that pamphlets assailing the Pope and the King of Spain are hawked up and down the streets of London; not one of these now survives. On the accession of Mary, a poem, written expressly to celebrate this event and the overthrow of Northumberland, was printed as a broadside for sale in the streets. Hundreds of this must have been circulated, but only one remains. Of sixty ballads entered for publication by one small publisher, William Pickering, only four can now be traced. The discovery of the Percy folio by a poet and an antiquary, just following its discovery by a servant who proposed to devote it to the service of Vulcan, is a memorable instance of the right book coming into the right hands at the right time.

Thomas Percy, Bishop of Dromore, was born at Bridgenorth in Shropshire in 1729. He claimed gentle blood on the strength of his name, which seems, however, to have been originally Piercy, and his immediate ancestors were certainly tradesmen. He gained an exhibition at the Grammar School, proceeded to Christ Church College, and in 1753 obtained the college living of Easton Maudit, Northamptonshire, where he had aristocratic parishioners, and his antiquarian tastes were fostered by the vicinity of the distinguished Anglo-Saxon scholar, Lye. It was probably about this time that he made the great discovery of his life, though we do not hear of it until he had experimented in translations from the Chinese through the medium of Portuguese and from the Icelandic. But in 1765 the *Reliques of Ancient Poetry* appeared, and made an era, not only in English, but in European literature, affording the date from which, upon the whole, the commencement of the Romantic School may most fitly be reckoned. Before its appearance, the mere announcement of its preparation had revealed the ripeness of the times. It is almost doubtful whether Percy would have ventured upon publication, at least so soon, but for the impulse he received from

Shenstone, a typical man of letters of the eighteenth century. Another characteristic figure, Thomas Warton, a pattern of the blended erudition and elegance that distinguish eighteenth-century scholarship at its best, ransacked the libraries of Oxford for him. He himself examined the Pepysian MSS. at Cambridge. Birch, Farmer, Grainger, Garrick, Goldsmith aided; and the editor, still not quite reassured on the subject of decorum, was able to hope that "the names of so many men of learning and character might serve as an amulet to guard him from every unfavourable censure for having bestowed any attention upon a parcel of old ballads." The excuse was hardly called for; the public seemed quite disposed to applaud in ancient writers what would have offended them in a modern. Johnson and Warburton, indeed, evinced some disposition to growl; but the former had a real kindness for Percy, and the latter was in this very year engaged in a controversy with Lowth, which can have left him little appetite for more. It must be admitted that Percy had done much—far too much—to propitiate the eighteenth century by deference to what was still the reigning taste in poetry. He dealt freely with his originals, both by addition and subtraction, and even inserted "a few modern attempts in the same kind of writing to atone for the rudeness of the more obsolete poems." Of these, Johnson spoke with just contempt. But Percy's patching of the old ballads is not altogether without excuse. Though many of the ballads in the folio are ancient texts, some are accommodated to the transcriber's own period, and there is no such thing as an authoritative text of any of them. Many have since Percy's time been found to exist in a number of discrepant versions; and, when the extant version is unique, it is certain that the text would be unsettled by the discovery of another copy. The standard texts of many popular (especially Scotch) ballads have been formed by Sir Walter Scott, whose combinations of the best features of several old versions into a single poem are so much superior to any of these taken separately that they must needs be accepted, even though the text had no existence before Scott. But neither had any of the versions he manipulated any better claim to authority than the rest. Percy merely treated his minstrels as they had treated each other. Writing, however, in the style of the eighteenth century, his re-handlings could not well be felicitous; but he would have fared still worse if he had essayed the method of Chatterton. His poetical instinct, also, must have been severely shocked by the occasional rudeness and prosiness of the ballads he was editing; many the work, at least in part, of true poets, but others composed or debased by mere village crowders. Not without a pang could an editor of poetical taste and feeling resign himself to print such a quatrain as this:

So Chester ever hath had since
An earl when England had a prince

RELIQUES
OF
ANCIENT ENGLISH POETRY:
CONSISTING OF
Old Heroic Ballads, Songs, and of Pieces of our earlier Poets,
(Chiefly of the Lyric kind.)
Together with some few of later Date.
VOLUME THE FIRST.
DURAT OPUS VATUM
LONDON:
Printed for J. Dodsley in Pall-Mall
M DCC LXV.

Title-page of first edition of Percy's "Reliques," 1765

And whenas princes there'd be none,
The profits to the crown have gone.

"Men with a turn for verse-writing," justly observes Percy's latest editors, "seem unable to resist the temptation of falsifying and forging old ballads." Neither, it may be retorted, are men of erudition able to resist the temptation of withdrawing the books they edit from the world at large by persistence in an obsolete and barbarous orthography. It is quite right that there should be one edition of the *Percy Ballads* to perpetuate the orthography of the original manuscript; but it may be hoped that one will suffice. Fortunately, the best of them, as well as the best, especially Scotch, that could be gathered from other sources may be read in a modernised form in the treasury brought together by the American professor, Francis Childs.

Percy rendered one more distinguished service to antiquarianism by his edition of *The Household Book of the Earl of Northumberland in 1512*, the first of the long line of similar publications which have so vividly illustrated the manners of past times, and so greatly influenced historical composition by showing how much more history may be than a mere record of events. His poem, "The Hermit of Warkworth," is only remarkable as an early example of English Romanticism. He became Bishop of Dromore in Ireland, and died in 1811.

A mery geste of
Robyn Hoode and of hys lyfe. wyth
a newe playe for to be played
in Maye games very ple-
sante and full of pastyme.
Lytel Iohn

Title-page of "A Mery Geste of Robyn Hoode," 1550, printed by Copland

The development of the ballad, as we have it in the Percy manuscript, may be traced along two lines—the song called forth by some contemporary event, usually political; and, to employ the happy expression of a modern writer, the débris formed by the crumbling down of the ancient metrical romance. The earliest English specimen of the former is the derisive ballad on the battle of Lewes, mentioned in a former chapter; and Laurence Minot's songs, three quarters of a century later, may be regarded as ballads. Compositions of the latter class, Arthurian and outside the Arthurian cycle, are numerous in the Percy folio. Infinitely the best is "The Boy and the Mantle," which, though here transferred to the Court of Arthur, originated abroad, and probably came into our literature from the French. It is, nevertheless, significant as an example of the attractive influence which made Arthur, like Alfred in another sphere, a nucleus of legend; and as humorously expressive

of that lax morality at the Arthurian court by which both the Round Table and the Idylls of the King came to disaster. Among the more elaborate of these Arthurian ballad-romances may be named *King Arthur and the King of Cornwall, The Green Knight, Sir Lambwell* (Launfal), and *The Marriage of Sir Gawain*, one of the best, not so much on account of the power of the poet as of the power of the story. The non-Arthurian romances include the tales of Sir Triamour and Sir Eglamour, and other imaginary heroes. In general, their poetical merit is small, and to convey an idea how legend could be effectively treated in ballad-poetry we must have recourse to Scotland, although the text which we are about to quote is later than the fifteenth or early sixteenth century. It illustrates, however, the progress of legend into poetry; first the myth itself, originating, as we have seen, in the power of prophecy or second sight attributed to Thomas of Ercildoune towards the end of the thirteenth century; next, the metrical romance written about the beginning of the fifteenth; lastly, the ballad, which, in its original shape, may not have been much later than the romance, but which, as we have it, is of far more recent date. It is very national, the conclusion, in particular, is a characteristic piece of the dry humour of Scotland. After True Thomas has kissed the Fairy Queen, and she has taken him up on her palfrey:

O they rode on, and farther on,
And they waded through rivers aboon the knee;
And they saw neither sun nor moon,
But they heard the roaring of the sea

It was mirk, mirk night; there was nae stern light;
And they waded through red blude to the knee:
For a' the blude that's shed on earth
Rins through the springs o' that countrie.

Sine they came on to a garden green,
And she pu'd an apple frae a tree,
Take this for thy wages, true Thomas,
It will give thee the tongue that can never lee.

'My tongue is mine ain," true Thomas said,
"A gudely gift ye wast gie to me;
I neither dought to buy or sell,
At fair or tryst where I may be.

I dought neither speak to prince nor peer,
Nor ask of grace from fair ladye."
Now hold thy peace, the lady said,
For as I say, so it must be.

He has gotten a coat of the even cloth,
And a pair of shoes of the velvet green;
And till seven years were gone and past,
True Thomas on earth was never seen.

Akin to these legendary ballads is another group treating of personages, fully believed by the writers to be historical, but in reality mythical and quasi-supernatural—whose "gestes," accordingly, form a connecting link between the legendary and the historical ballad. The most remarkable example is

Robin Hood, whom modern criticism has transformed from a forester into a forest elf, a kinsman of Herne the Hunter. It can hardly be considered a dry or destructive criticism which thus metamorphoses Robin Hood and Maid Marian into Oberon and Titania! It is admitted, however, that, mythical as the original Robin Hood may have been, his name was applied by ballad writers to "any robber leader who made his home in forests or on moors, excelled in archery, defied the oppressive forest laws, and thus attracted popular sympathy." It thus has much significance as a type of the age-long resistance of the Saxon to Norman forest tyranny. It appears from Peacock's *Last Day of Windsor Forest* that so late as 1814 the name was bestowed upon a farmer near Windsor, who, armed with two weapons which Robin Hood never possessed, a gun and a legal opinion in his

Kirkley Nunnery, the traditional burial-place of Robin Hood

From Stukeley's "Itinerarium Curiosum," 1776

favour, "sallied forth daily into the forest to kill the King's deer, and returned home every evening loaded with spoil." In some measure, then, the Robin Hood cycle may be regarded as a national epic, celebrating the national characteristics of love of sport, and hatred of oppression. The treatment of so many hands is necessarily unequal, but a sylvan breath blows through the whole. There is pathos and dignity in the closing scene, when Robin Hood, having repaired to Kirkley nunnery for medical treatment, is treacherously bled to death by the Abbess:

He bethought him of his bugle horn,
  Which hung low doun to his knee;
He set his horn unto his mouth,
  And blew out weak blasts three.

Then Little John, when hearing him,
  As he sat under a tree,
"I fear my master is near dead,
  He blows so wearily."

Then Little John to Kirkley is gone,
As fast as he can dree ;
But when he came to Kirkley Hall,
He broke locks two or three,

Until he came to bold Robin,
Then fell he on his knee ;
"A boon, a boon," cries Little John,
"Master, I beg of thee."

"What is that boon," quoth Robin Hood,
"Little John, thou begs of me?"
"It is to burn fair Kirkley Hall,
And all their nunnery."

"Now nay, now nay," quoth Robin Hood,
"That boon I'll not grant thee ;
I never hurt woman in all my life,
Nor man in her company.

"I never hurt fair maid in all my time,
Nor at my end shall it be,
But give me my bent bow in my hand,
And a broad arrow I'll let flee ;
And where the arrow is taken up,
There shall my grave digged be."

Another important ballad cycle is the Northumbrian, recording the exploits of three outlaws, Adam Bell, Clim of the Clough, and William of Cloudeslie. These personages are possibly historical, but their adventures have been overlaid with many accretions, including traditions imported from the legend of Robin Hood. They thus form a connecting link with the genuine historical ballad, particularly as the two most celebrated examples of this belong to the Border. *Chevy Chase* is too universally known to require particular mention. *The Battle of Otterbourne* sings a memorable conflict in 1388, when the Scotch leader, Douglas, was slain, and the English leader, Percy (Hotspur), made prisoner. Both nations could take pride in the event, and the hands of both may be discovered in the ballad, an interesting example of the modifications which such pieces underwent from their first rude beginnings until they eventually attained coherence, the final redaction in this instance proceeding from no less a hand than Sir Walter Scott's. The composition is too lengthy, but is in parts very spirited :

They lighted high on Otterbourne,
Upon the bent sae brown,
They lighted high on Otterbourne,
And threw their pallions down.

And he that had a bonnie boy
Sent out his horse to grass ;
And he that had not a bonnie boy,
His own servant he was.

And up then spake a little page
Before the peep of dawn ;
"O waken ye, waken ye, my good lord,
For Percy's hard at hand."

"Ye lie, ye lie, ye liar loud,
Sae loud I hear ye lee;
For Percy had not men yestreen
To dight my men and me.

But I have dreamed a dreary dream
Beyond the Isle of Skye;
I saw a dead man win a fight,
And I think that man was I."

Upon this reminiscence he arms, but the delay occasioned by his incredulity is fatal to him:

He belted on his gude braid sword,
And to the field he ran,
But he forgot the helmet gude
That should have kept his brain.

It is not likely that *Chevy Chase* and *Otterbourne* became the subjects of poems other than chants of a rude kind, until long after the events recorded

The Banner of Douglas at the Battle of Otterbourne

From Scott's "Border Antiquities"

had taken place. Their survival in song, when so many events of greater importance are forgotten by the minstrel, may be ascribed to the strong clannish feeling prevailing upon the Border, and the continuance of turbulence and warfare in that district until a late period. The memories of Southern bards were less tenacious, and the low contemporary condition of poetry in England may account for the absence of ballads on Agincourt or the Wars of the Roses. At the end of the century, and the beginning of the next, however, a decided disposition was shown to versify contemporary incidents. *The Babes in the Wood* is conjectured, though doubtfully, to have been a veiled allegory of the murder of the young princes in the Tower; and Bosworth and Flodden furnished matter for ballad epics. One poem on Flodden is especially remarkable as a survival of alliterative metre to so late a period. It is further curious as a tribute to a patron, being composed for the special glorification of the house of Stanley. The Stanleys also figure largely in one of the most interesting poems of the period, the ballad of *Lady Bessie*, no other than Elizabeth of York, the queen of Henry VII. This long poem is extremely remarkable, as being

to all appearance the composition of the princess's counsellor and agent, Humphrey Brereton, a servant of Lord Stanley, and giving a most circumstantial, though probably much over-coloured, account of Elizabeth's share in the revolution by her intrigues with the Earl of Richmond, and particulars, no doubt authentic, of Brereton's own adventures. It is further valuable as an illustration of the political demoralisation of the times, the Duke of Buckingham being praised to the skies for having conspired with Elizabeth against Richard, though he had been a chief agent in the deposition of her brother. Portions of the ballad probably do not proceed from Brereton himself, as he could scarcely have confused the tragedies of the young princes and of the Duke of Clarence, and drowned the former in the latter's butt of wine. Brereton's account of his own adventures, though most interesting, is prosaic: in describing Bosworth his colleague, if such there be, rises into poetry. Sir William Harrington beseeches King Richard to fly:

Your horse is ready at your hand,
Another day you may worship win,
And to reign with royalty,
And wear your crown and be our king.

"Give me my battle-axe in my hand,
And set my crown on my head so high,
For by him that made both sun and moon,
King of England this day will I die."

Beside his head they hewed the crown,
And danged on him as they were wood:
They stroke his basnet to his head
Until his brains came out in blood.

Not all the historical ballads are so tragic, a considerable number deal with humorous anecdotes of kings or distinguished characters. One of the best known and most entertaining is *The Abbot of Canterbury*, but the tale is common to many nations. Purely English is the "Geste of King Edward the Fourth and the Tanner of Tamworth," where the affable monarch, meeting a tanner riding "a mare of four shilling," inquires the way to Drayton Basset, and is answered:

"The next pair of gallows thou comest unto,
Turn in at thy right hand."

The king, humouring the joke, enters into discourse with the tanner, and expresses a desire to become his apprentice:

"Marry, heaven forfend," the tanner replied,
"That thou my 'prentice were,
Thou woldst spend more good than I should win
By forty shilling a year."

The king proposes to the tanner to change steeds with him, the tanner agrees, but demands and obtains twenty groats boot for his four shilling mare, and even then makes reservations:

"Although thou hast gotten Brocke my mare,
Thou gettest not my cow hide."

The king disclaims all desire to appropriate the article in question, which is destined to bring the tanner to grief, for as he mounts, marvelling much whether the stirrup be of gold or brass, the generous courser, admiring neither the hoofs nor the horns of the hide which the tanner has pitched upon his back, bolts with him, throws him, and he is glad to recover his mare by paying back the boot he has had with her. Then the king, Robin Hood like, blows a blast on his bugle; the courtiers come trooping up; the tanner, expecting a halter, gets an estate, and concludes the ballad by a promise to his Majesty that if ever he cometh to merry Tamworth neat's leather shall clout his shoon.

Another variety of the humorous ballad, of which "As it befell one Saturday" is a good example, is the *Tom o' Bedlam* ballad, formed by stringing together a medley of lines from different pieces, with no regard to anything but rhyme and metre. The effect somewhat resembles that of Pope's *Song by a Person of Quality*.

The most remarkable pieces which remain to be noticed belong in general to one of two classes, ballads founded on legends outside the cycles of chivalric romance, or ballads treating of events of the day. Both for the most part appear to belong to a later period than that at which we have arrived, and must be reserved for notice along with the poetry of the late sixteenth century. Among those which have the best claim to antiquity is the tragic history of Glasgerion, the Arion of Scottish legend, who

> Could harp a fish out of saut water,
> Or water out of a stane,
> Or milk out of a maiden's breasts
> That bairn had never nane.

Glasgerion has an amour with a lady of high degree; his page personates him; the lady discovers the deceit, and kills herself:

> But home then went Glasgerion,
> A woeful man was he:
> Says, "Come hither, thou Jack, my boy,
> Come thou hither to me.
>
> "If I had killed a man to-night,
> Jack, I would tell it thee:
> But if I have not killed a man to-night,
> Jack, thou hast killed three."
>
> And he pulled out his bright brown sword,
> And dried it on his sleeve,
> And he smote off that lither[1] lad's head,
> And asked no man no leave.
>
> He set the sword's point to his breast,
> The pummel to a stone.
> Through the falseness of that lither lad
> Those three lives were all gone.

One famous ballad stands out prominently from the rest as being, so far as

[1] Treacherous.

known, the invention of the anonymous writer. It is *The Nut Brown Maid*, probably written towards 1500, and so falling within our present scope. It was first printed in Antwerp in 1502. It is a rare instance of a ballad in dialogue, but more than this, an Amoebean idyll. A lover, whose state of mind nothing but its absolute necessity to the poem could induce us to tolerate, puts his sweetheart's affection to the proof by pretending to be an outlaw. Never were the tenderness and truth of womanhood more beautifully displayed than in her acceptance of the supposed situation, which is even carried so far that she does not shrink when informed that he has already a mistress, whose servant she will have to be. There can of course be only one issue from such a situation. The metre is as exceptional as the theme, and more musical and sonorous than that of any previous lyric in the language, and the pair of refrains running through the piece are managed with extreme skill. The following four stanzas are a fair specimen of the prolonged but never tedious dialogue.

HE.

I counsel you, remember how
  It is no maiden's law
Nothing to doubt, but to run out
  To wood with an outlaw.
For ye must there in your hand bear
  A bow, ready to draw:
And as a thief, thus must you live
  Ever in dread and awe.
Whereby to you great harm might grow:
  Yet had I lever then
That I unto the green wood go
  Alone, a banished man.

SHE.

I think not nay, but as ye say,
  It is no maiden's lore;
But love may make me for your sake,
  As I have said before,
To come on foot, to hunt and shoot
  To get us meat in store.
For so that I your company
  May have, I ask no more:
From which to part, it makes my heart
  As cold as any stone;
For in my mind, of all mankind,
  I love but you alone.

HE.

For an outlaw this is the law
  That men him take and bind
Without pity, hangèd to be,
  And waver with the wind.
If I had need (as God forbede!)
  What rescue could ye find?
Forsooth I trow, you and your bow
  For fear would draw behind;

¶ To pay at the ferp for a man and his bagage. iiij. mit⁹
¶ Item a hors the man and his bagage. i. g⁹.
¶ Item an emp hors only i d. Brokers to pay for a cloth vnder xl.
b. the broker shal haue ij. g⁹.
¶ Item for a cloth above xl. f. the broker hath iij g⁹.
¶ Item C. elis Cotton cloth payth lyke a clothe iij. g⁹. ꝛc.

BE it right or wrōg. these mē a mong. on womē do cōplaine
Affermyng this. how that it is. a labour spent in vaine
To loue the wele. for neuer a dele. they loue a man agayne
For lere. a man do. what he can. ther fauour to attayne
Yet yf a newe. to them pursue. ther furst trew louer than
Laboureth for nought and from her thought. he is a bannusshed mā

I Say not nay. but that all day. it is bothe writ and sayde
That womans fayth. is as who sayth. all vtterly decayed
But nevtheles. right good wrues. i this case mught be layd
That they lone trewe. ꝛ cōpnew. recorde ꝑ Nutbrowne maide
Which fre m her loue. whā her to proue. he cam to make his mone
Wolde not departe. for in her herte. she loued but hym allone

THan betwene vs. lete vs discusse. what was all the maner.
Be twene them too. we wyl also. telle all they peyne in fere
That she was in. now I begynne. soo that ye me answere.
Wherfore ye. that present be. I pray you geue an eare
I am the knyght. I cum be nyght. as secret as I can
Saying alas. thus stondyth the cause. I am a bannusshed man

AN I pour wylle. for to fulfylle. in this wyl not refuse
Trusting to shewe. in wordis fewe. ꝑ men haue an ille vse
To ther owne shame wymē. to blame. ꝛ causeles thē accuse.
Therfore to you. I answere now. alle wymen to excuse.
Mysyn owne herte dere. wyssyng what chere. I prey you telle anon
For in my mynde. of all mankynde I loue but you alon

SHe dith so. a dede is do. wherfore mo che harme shal growe
My destenye. is for to dey. a shamful dethe I trowe
Or elles to flee. the tone must bee. none other wey I knowe.
But to withdrawe. as an outlawe. and take me to my bowe
Lxxv

From Richard Arnold's "Chronicle," circ. 1503

And no mervaile, for little availe
Were in your counsel then ;
Wherefore I'll to the green wood go
Alone, a banished man.

SHE.

Right well know ye that women be
But feeble for to fight ;
No woman hede it is indede
To be as bold as Knight :
Yet in such fere if that you were
With enemies day and night,
I would withstand, with bow in hand,
To grieve them as I might,
And you to save, as women have,
From death men many a one ;
For in my mind, of all mankind,
I love but you alone.

The Nut Brown Maid is indeed a pearl of song, and the same may be said of many other British ballads, especially those of Scotland, of which, in general, we shall have to speak later. Their greatest importance, however, does not consist in the merit of individual pieces, but in the revival of European poetry of which they were in such large measure the instruments. The popular poetry of Germany, Scandinavia, and Spain is not inferior to that of the British Isles, but the study of these came later, and the impulse to it proceeded from Britain. The Romantic School, in so far as popular poetry was an element in it, dates from the day when the future Irish Bishop picked the torn and dirty manuscript out of the bureau in the little Shropshire town.

CHAPTER X

THE AGE OF THE FIRST TUDORS

We have now arrived at the verge of an epochal period in English letters, when, no longer oscillating between contending forces as in the middle ages, or plunged into torpor when it ought to be going on to victory, literature presents itself as the expression of the thought and language of a united nation, and at the same time as a growing organism, continually developing new phases of activity, and augmenting simultaneously in depth and in breadth. The character of unity, indeed, had belonged to it for more than a century; but just when the amalgamation of Saxon and Norman was perfected, a blight seemed to wither the promise of their union. Enough has been said upon this subject; it need only be added that the paralysis of literary productiveness in England cannot, as in Italy, be ascribed in any degree to the enlistment of the best minds in the service of classical studies. Civil strife may be alleged as a reason, and it is certainly true that the Wars of the Roses were dynastic contests involving no principle, and powerless to fire the imagination and create impassioned feeling as war waged for freedom or even for conquest might have done. But no single cause will account for a phenomenon manifested simultaneously in almost every country in Europe, especially at a time when light was breaking in on all sides, and the arts were flourishing beyond previous example. The reawakening of lulled genius near the close of the fifteenth century is not so mysterious as its slumber; yet of the two great intellectual movements which apparently called it into being it may be said that the Renaissance was rather its nurse than its parent, and the Reformation rather its consequence than its cause.

The literary Renaissance dates from Petrarch, and had consequently long preceded the revival at the end of the fifteenth century. It had, as we have seen, been rather detrimental than favourable to original power; but when original power awoke of itself, it found that the Renaissance had greatly expanded and enriched its field of operation. The English author at the end of the fifteenth century addressed a different public from that which he would have encountered at the end of the fourteenth. Although actual literary production had been sparse and unimportant in the intervening period, literature itself was more widely and highly esteemed. The idea of its being the special property of the clerical or even of the scholarly class had been given up. English prose, which no one before Mandeville's translator had written except in devotional treatises, now claimed by far the largest share of

published literature. Translations were being made from all cultivated languages, and each new version begot the desire for another. Such events as the progress of Turkish conquest and the discoveries of the Spaniards and Portuguese had powerfully affected the mind of man, and engendered a thirst for information which could only be gratified by books. Just at this conjuncture the printing press came in perfect correspondence with the new order of things. All these various influences, so favourable to literature, may be summed up under the head of Renaissance, a general fermentation of the spirit, eventually carrying those of whom it took possession far beyond that exclusive veneration for the classics which had for the time contributed to repress originality of genius.

Henry VIII.

After the portrait by Holbein in Lord Leconfield's collection at Petworth

The Renaissance may also not unfairly be described as one of the parents of the second potent influence which regenerated literature and made it great, the Reformation. Two widely differing strains of ancestry may be traced in the Reformation's pedigree. There were in the first place the spiritually minded, the simple and devout who remained unaffected by the flood of new light which the Renaissance was bringing in, and relied solely upon their own pious instincts. In the second place were the scholars, champions of the Renaissance in no way remarkable for piety, but whose æsthetic taste and whose critical conscience were revolted by the prevalent superstitions.

The *Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum* sums up the feelings of such men as perfectly as Luther's discourses sum up the feelings of the religious; and

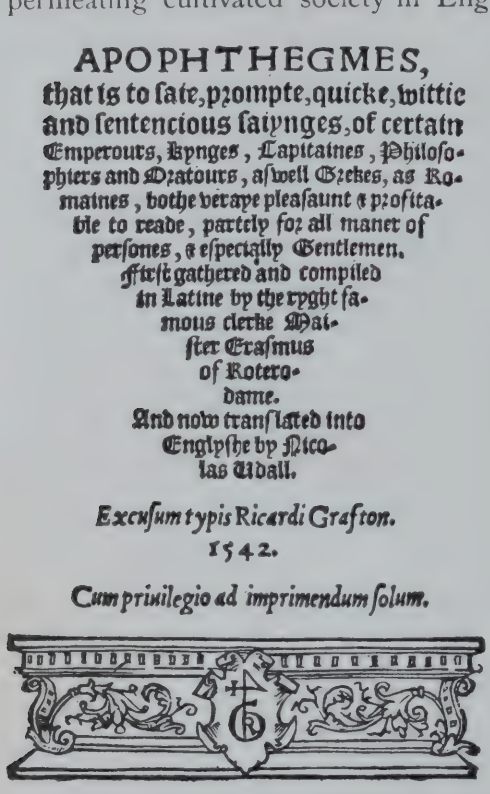
Desiderius Erasmus

After the original woodcut by Albert Dürer

may remind us that there was a Renaissance beyond the Alps, and that if the humanists of Leo the Tenth's court preferred him to Luther, the

humanists of Germany inclined the other way. Almost the perfect mean between the two extremes was held by Erasmus; and when we see how Renaissance and Reformation between them could equip that consummate man of letters, and with what a public they could provide him, we see to what a height they were capable of exalting literature.

To make an Erasmus required a combination of the Italian elements then permeating cultivated society in England with the sound and sterling type of her ancient character. English scholars visited Italy, some, like Pace, sent expressly by patrons for the purpose of study. The libraries of newly founded colleges were enriched with books and manuscripts imported from Italy. Italian secretaries were becoming indispensable to sovereigns. Italian sculptors and artists were remedying the backward state of the arts in a country where the mediæval style had gone out and the Renaissance had not come in. Italian merchants flourished in London, and Italian ecclesiastics bereft the natives of bishoprics and benefices. Distinguished men of letters, like Polydore Vergil and Carmelianus, found themselves at home in a country where the Italian language was studied, Italian books were read and sometimes translated, and even Italian writing masters were imported to regenerate the national handwriting. Had the English character possessed less native vigour Italy might have dominated her literature as completely as France now dominates that of the other Latin peoples, but while willing to be instructed the national mind refused to be subjugated. The most perfect instance to be found of the combination of the two types, the exemplar at the same time of the new Englishman and the true Englishman, is Sir THOMAS MORE, the enthusiast for Pico della Mirandola, whose life he wrote, the friend of Erasmus, and, save when religious differences interfered, of every good and intellectual man with whom it was possible for him to come into contact. It further happens that the book upon which his literary reputation rests is, though originally written in Latin, the truest representative of the better English mind of its day.


APOPHTHEGMES,
that is to sate, prompte, quicke, wittie and sentencious sayinges, of certain Emperours, Kynges, Capitaines, Philosophiers and Oratours, aswell Grekes, as Romaines, bothe verye pleasaunt & profitable to reade, partely for all maner of persones, & especially Gentlemen, ffirste gathered and compiled in Latine by the ryght famous clerke Maister Erasmus of Roterodame.
And now translated into Englyshe by Nicolas Udall.

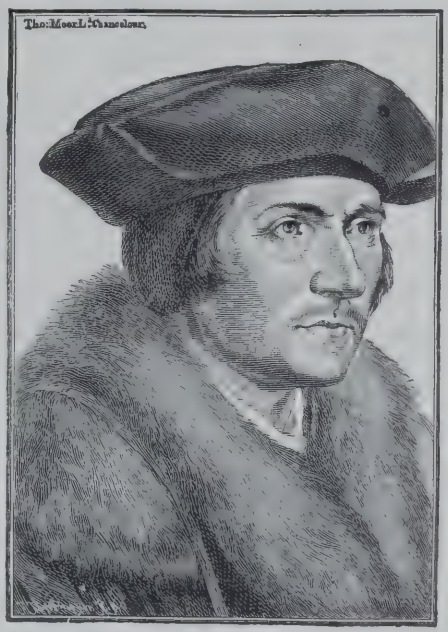
Excusum typis Ricardi Grafton.
1542.

Cum priuilegio ad imprimendum solum.

Title-page of Erasmus' "Apophthegmes," 1542

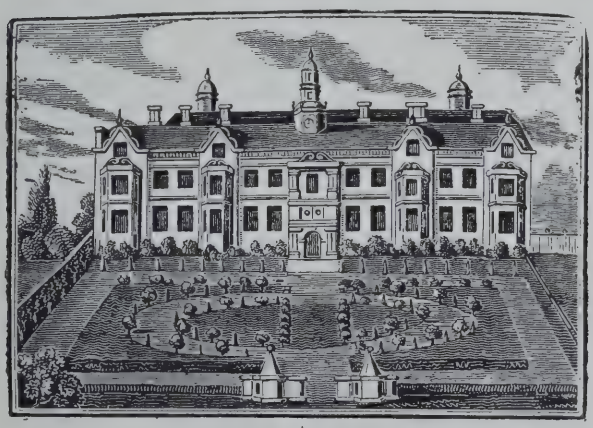
It is needless to enter at any great length into a history so well known as Sir Thomas More's. Born in 1478, educated in the household of Cardinal Morton, Archbishop of

Canterbury, and afterwards at Oxford, where he learned Greek from Grocyn and Linacre, he formed at nineteen an intimate friendship with Erasmus, was called to the bar at or about the same early age, was elected to Parliament at twenty-six, and there distinguished himself by frustrating an attempt at extortion by Henry VII., who explained to the Spanish Ambassador that his subjects would become disorderly if they were too well off, an evil which he certainly did everything to obviate as far as in him lay. Henry avenged himself by fining More's father, but the new reign brought favour to the son, who was employed in embassies and other business of State, and received the strongest tokens of personal attachment from the sovereign, which did not blind him to Henry's utter ruthlessness when public affairs were concerned. "If my head," he told his son-in-law Roper as early as 1525, "should win him a castle in France, it should not fail to go." In 1529 he succeeded Wolsey as Lord Chancellor, the first instance of the office being conferred upon a layman. His character for ability, industry, and integrity in the discharge of his judicial functions was the very highest: the one stain upon his memory is his persecution of heretics, which it is difficult to reconcile either with the general humanity of his disposition or with the liberality of religious sentiment which he had expressed in his early writings. He needed but to have looked at his own Utopia to have seen the possibility of the union of firm faith with wide toleration; but probably he was alarmed at what he deemed the social consequences of the new movement, and irritated by his acrimonious controversy with Tyndale, and his deep annoyance at the proceedings connected with the royal divorce. His opposition to this and to the more lenient treatment of heretics which came in its train cost him the Chancellorship in 1532: in 1534 he and Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, were imprisoned for refusing to renounce the supremacy of the Pope; and in 1535 were beheaded for denying the supremacy of the King. It is impossible to withhold the deepest sympathy for victims so illustrious perishing for conscience sake, even though they were but treated as they themselves had treated poor and defenceless men. Henry's action, however, was



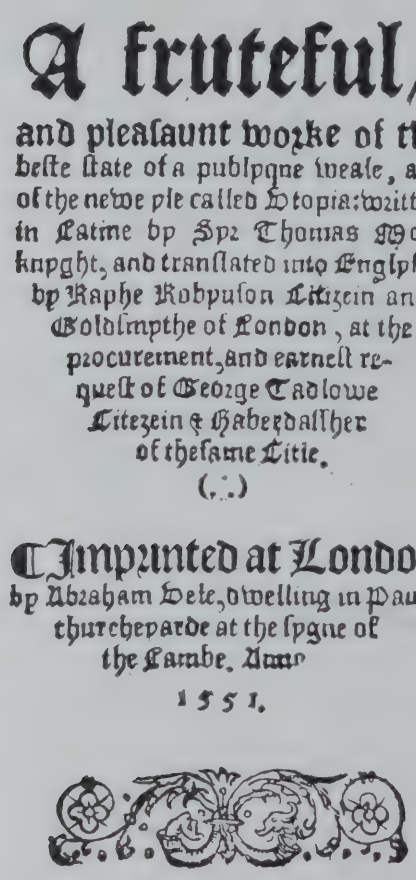
Sir Thomas More

From an engraving by Bartolozzi after a drawing by Holbein



Beaufort House, Chelsea, where More lived

not brutal tyranny, but high policy. He acted in the spirit of the French Revolutionists when they proclaimed their irreparable breach with royalty by the sacrifice of an innocent and well-intentioned King. Nothing could so clearly tell the nation and the world that Papal pretensions would never again be tolerated in England. The Pope on his part was playing the same game. He had hastened the crisis by sending Fisher a cardinal's hat, protesting afterwards that he did not know how deeply the Bishop had incurred the King's displeasure. If this was so, he was badly served by his agents, but this is hardly credible of so sagacious a pontiff as Paul III. It is more probable that he wished to drive Henry into extreme courses which he thought would provoke a revolution, and that the heads of More and Fisher were but counters in the game played between Pope and King.


A fruteful/
and pleasaunt worke of the
beste state of a publyque weale, and
of the newe yle called Utopia: written
in Latine by Syr Thomas More
knyght, and translated into Englysshe
by Raphe Robynson Citizein and
Goldsmythe of London, at the
procurement, and earnest re-
quest of George Tadlowe
Citezein & Haberdasshet
of thesame Citie.
(..)
Imprynted at London
by Abraham Vele, dwelling in Pauls
churcheyarde at the sygne of
the Lambe. Anno
1551.

Title-page of Robinson's translation of "Utopia," 1551

More's character probably owes something in our estimation to the fact that it has been mainly transmitted to us by an affectionate son-in-law, but the general truth of the portrait is attested by the concurring suffrages of the best and wisest men of his time. Men of genius like Erasmus, men of erudition like Colet, men of science like Linacre, men of piety like Fisher, were his devoted friends: even men of affairs like Henry and Wolsey honoured, and, so far as their natures permitted, loved him. Not a voice is raised against his deportment in the highest legal office; and, indeed, the circumstances attending his fall and death are the conclusive proof of his unbending integrity. The most characteristic trait in his disposition was a geniality so exuberant that it is highly to his honour to have reconciled it with the gravity befitting the magistrate. When at the height of his prosperity he lived with the simplicity, and amid his misfortunes he displayed the resignation, of a true practical philosopher. Intellectually, he was rather brilliant than great; his precocity and powers of adaptation were marvellous; he shone equally among scholars and statesmen so long as originality was not required; but he was rather fitted to adorn than to extend the domain of letters; and as a statesman he took narrow views and misunderstood the spirit of his time.

If, however, More was no creator in literature, he was a most felicitous adapter and translator. The ideal commonwealth of Plato lives again in his *Utopia*, a work whose title, though strictly a solecism, has become a portion of the vocabulary of every European tongue, and which is itself the parent of numberless imitations, not one of which has approached its celebrity. Though

originally written in Latin, and published first at Louvain (1516), then successively at Paris, Basel, and Vienna, and not once in England during its author's life, and translated into German, French, and Italian before its appearance in an English dress, it has ranked as an English classic since the publication of the fine translation by Ralph Robinson in 1551, and is probably as much read now as at any period of its existence.

Plan of Utopia
From More's "Utopia," 1518

Unlike most fictions, especially those which have no concern with real life, More's romance charms less by its fancy than by its apparent reasonableness. The laws and customs of Utopia seem, generally speaking, so obviously right that we can hardly believe that they do not exist somewhere, and wonder why this locality is not nearer home. What can be more proper than that everybody should work, that nobody should work to excess, that there should be no wars except for grievous wrongs, that Kings should be forbidden to hoard, that there should be no monopolies? And, in fact, More is continually holding up the example of his Utopians to his countrymen, and sharply censuring the social inequalities and injustices which he perceives at home. It does not appear to trouble him that the innovations he recommends would compel a complete reconstruction of society: when, however, he had himself become something of a power in the State, he practically repudiated the feature of Utopian policy whose conception does him most honour. In nothing had he appeared so far in advance of his time as in religious toleration:—

King Utopus, even at the first beginning, hearing that the inhabitants of the land were before his coming thither in continual dissension and strife among themselves for their religions: perceiving also that this common dissension (whiles every several sect took several parts in fighting for their country) was the only occasion of his conquest over them all, as soon as he had gotten the victory first of all he made a decree that it should be lawful for every man to favour and follow what religion he would, and that he might do the best he could to bring others to his opinion, so that he did it peaceably, gently, quietly, and soberly, without hasty and contentious rebuking and inveighing against others. If he could not by fair and gentle speech induce them unto his opinion, yet he should use no kind of violence, and refrain from displeasant and seditious words. To him that would vehemently and fervently in this cause strive and contend was decreed banishment and bondage. This law did King Utopus make not only for the maintenance of peace, which he saw through continual contention and mortal hatred utterly extinguished: but also because he thought this decree should make for the furtherance of religion. Whereof he durst determine and

Io. Clemens. Hythlodæus. Tho. Morus. Pet. Aegid.

Headpiece from More's "Utopia," 1518

decide nothing unadvisedly, as doubting whether God desiring manifold and diverse sorts of honour would inspire sundry men with sundry kinds of religion. And this surely he thought a very unmeet and foolish thing, and a point of arrogant presumption, to compel all others by violence and threatenings to agree to the same that thou believest to be true. Furthermore though there be one religion which alone is true, and all others vain and superstitious, yet did he well foresee (so that the matter were handled with reason and sober modesty) that the truth of its own power would at the last issue out and come to light.

Many of the leading spirits of the time no doubt thought with More, but nowhere else can the principle of toleration be found so clearly enunciated. His subsequent desertion of it cannot in the case of such a man be imputed to either ambition or timidity. He had no doubt come to regard the views of his youth as unpractical, and congratulated himself upon his growth in good sense, while he was but giving one more proof how much wiser even in practical matters the philosopher may sometimes be than the man of affairs. In many other passages he assails the vices of his time with wit and raillery. The following is a most cutting piece of irony. After observing that the Utopians never enter into treaties, he adds:—

Our Lorde blesse you

Myne derely beloued doughter I doubt not but by the reason of the comfortable resorting hither (in these troublous times both for your comforte) to these fathers of the charterhouse & (as) Reynolde also indyted to death for treason whose matters & causes I know not / I am sure to put you in trouble & fere of mynde concerning your kynges highnes specially for that it ys not unlykely but that you shall be also brought before the commissioners here my selfe I thinke yt necessary to admonysshe you of the very truthe / to thende that you myghte sometyme more hope thyder the matter specially left upon other towne yt myghte appease your heuynesse / not more then fere thyder the matter ys on the tother syde / wherefore ye shall understand that on fryday the last day of aprile in the after (as) lieutenaunt came in hyther unto me & shewed me that (as) he would speke w^th^ me / whereupon I dyssired my goode & went out (as) lieutenaunt into the gallery to them / where I met me found knowinge & found vnknowen in the way / And in secret communyng in to the chamber where hyth maistershyp fat[her] (as) Rastell (as) Solicitor (as) Bedyll & (as) doctour Bucgonnell / I was offred to sit w^th^ them which in no wyse I would / whereupon (as) secretary vnto me that he doubted not but that I had by such frends hyther had resorted to me sene the newe statute made at the sytting of the parliament / whereunto I answered ye verely / by yt for as much as beyng there I hard no communication of the people / I thought yt hytell nede for me to beston myne eyen them / & therefore I redelyuered the bote shortly / & the effect of the ste I neuer marked nor studyed to put in remembraunce / Then asked me whether I had not red the first statute of them of hymself beyng Lord of the chyrche / whereunto I answered yes / my maistershyp declared vnto me that hyth ye was more by an parliament ordeyned that hyth hyghnesse & hys heyres shuld be supreme hed of the chyrche of englande vnder crist / the hyghe powar of hyth commynalte there assembled shuld demaund & what my mynde was therein / whereunto I good fayth I had well trusted that the kynd and discreet dyssimuled my mynde

Facsimile Letter from Sir Thomas More to his Daughter

British Museum, Arundel MS. 152

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They be brought into this opinion chiefly because that in those parts of the world leagues between princes be wont to be kept and observed very slenderly. For here in Europa, and especially in these parts where the faith and religion of Christ reigneth, the majesty of leagues is everywhere esteemed holy and inviolable: partly through the justice and goodness of princes, and partly at the reverence and motion of the head bishops. Which like as they make no promise themselves, but they do very religiously perform the same, so they exhort all princes in any wise to abide by their promises, and them that refuse so to do, by their pontificial power and authority they compel thereto.

John Colet

From Holland's "Heroologia," 1620

More knew perfectly well that in no age had public faith been more systematically violated by sovereigns than in his own, and that "the head bishops" were much more likely to exhort monarchs to break their promises than to keep them. His satire is an excellent specimen of the mocking yet earnest Renaissance spirit of which, with all his decorum, he was a leading English representative.

After the *Utopia*, the most important work by More, or ascribed to him, is the unfinished *Life of King Richard the Third*. A Latin version of this work exists, and it has been questioned which is the original. It is also a question, whether, on the strength of an old tradition and some appearance of the book's proceeding from an eye-witness, it should not be attributed to Cardinal Morton, in which case More would only be the translator. This view appears to us highly probable, for the following reasons. It is unlikely that More should have left so brief a work unfinished, which Morton, a busy statesman stricken in years, might well have done. The neatness of the style, which led Hallam to term it the first English classic, is a phenomenon not uncommon in translations from the Latin, when native English exuberance was tamed by imitation of the tersest of tongues. Camden's *Elizabeth* is a conspicuous instance. If so, it is more probable that More would render another man's work

than his own. The extremely favourable view of Edward the Fourth's character would scarcely have been taken by More, but would be inevitable to Morton, who must have written when Edward's daughter was Queen of England. This character—not a bad piece of historical painting if the shadows had not been left out—may be cited as a fair specimen of the book, and as showing how much it wears the air of a translation from the Latin :—

> He was a goodly personage, and very princely to behold, of heart courageous, politic in counsel, in adversity nothing abashed, in prosperity rather joyful than proud, in peace just and merciful, in war sharp and fierce, in the field bold and hardy, and nathless no further than wisdom would adventure. Whose wars whoso well considers, he shall no less commend his wisdom where he avoided than his manhood when he vanquished. He was of visage lovely, of body mighty, strong, and clean made: howbeit in his latter days with over liberal diet, somewhat corpulent and burly, and nathless not uncomely: he was of youth greatly given to fleshly wantonness, from which health of body, in great prosperity and fortune, without a special grace hardly refraineth. This fault not greatly grieved the people; for neither could any man's pleasure extend to the displeasure of very many, and was without violence, and over that in his latter days lessened and well left. In which time in his latter days this realm was in quiet and prosperous estate: no fear of outward enemies, no war in hand, nor none towards but such as no man looked for; the people toward the prince not in a constrained fear but in a willing and loving obedience, among themselves the commons in good peace.

Thomas Cromwell

After the portrait in the National Portrait Gallery

More's theological writings will be alluded to in their place, they are not very important. He was the most distinguished among a group of distinguished men united by a community of tastes and objects, who, if they had assumed a common title, might have been known as the Erasmians. Few of them wrote much, but their influence on culture was very great, especially in the dissemination of the new learning which, contrary it may be to their intention, undermined the authority of the Church. Among them may especially be mentioned JOHN COLET (1467–1519), Dean of St. Paul's and Founder of St. Paul's School, whom travel in Italy had made a Neoplatonist, and, for his age, a daringly original expositor of Scripture: WILLIAM GROCYN (1446–1519), the principal champion of humanism in the University of Oxford, and at the

same time "half a schoolman," Biblical critic and commentator on the Fathers; THOMAS LINACRE (1460–1524), the learned physician and restorer of the study of the ancient medical writers, of whom it was doubted whether he was the better grammarian or physician; and RICHARD PACE (1482–1536), the diplomatist. At no previous time would such an alliance *junctarum Camoenarum* have been possible in England. It owed much to the countenance of Henry VIII., who not merely patronised literature with munificence and discrimination, but took a warm personal interest in it. If the wrecks of the beautiful monastic churches which cover the land exhibit him as in one point of view an architect of ruin, the mighty promoter of culture lives to this day in Trinity College, the greatest collegiate foundation in Europe, in the five Regius Professorships, and in the Royal College of Physicians.

Old St. Paul's Cathedral, before the burning of the spire

From an engraving by Hollar

Perhaps the most perfect example of English prose in the first quarter of the sixteenth century is a translation, the rendering of Froissart's Chronicles by Lord Berners. JOHN BOURCHIER, second Baron Berners, was a member of a distinguished family which had helped Henry VII. to the throne, and great nephew of the famous archbishop who had crowned three successive English monarchs who had attained the throne by revolutions. He was probably born about 1467, and first appears in history as holding a command in a war with France, and as concerned in the suppression of the Cornish insurrection in 1497. Henry VIII. favoured him, lent him money, and, perhaps to put him into the way of reimbursing the obligation, made him Chancellor of the Exchequer. Berners' abilities certainly did not lie in the direction of finance, he was in debt to the day of his death.

Old St. Paul's Cathedral, after the burning of the spire

From an engraving by Hollar

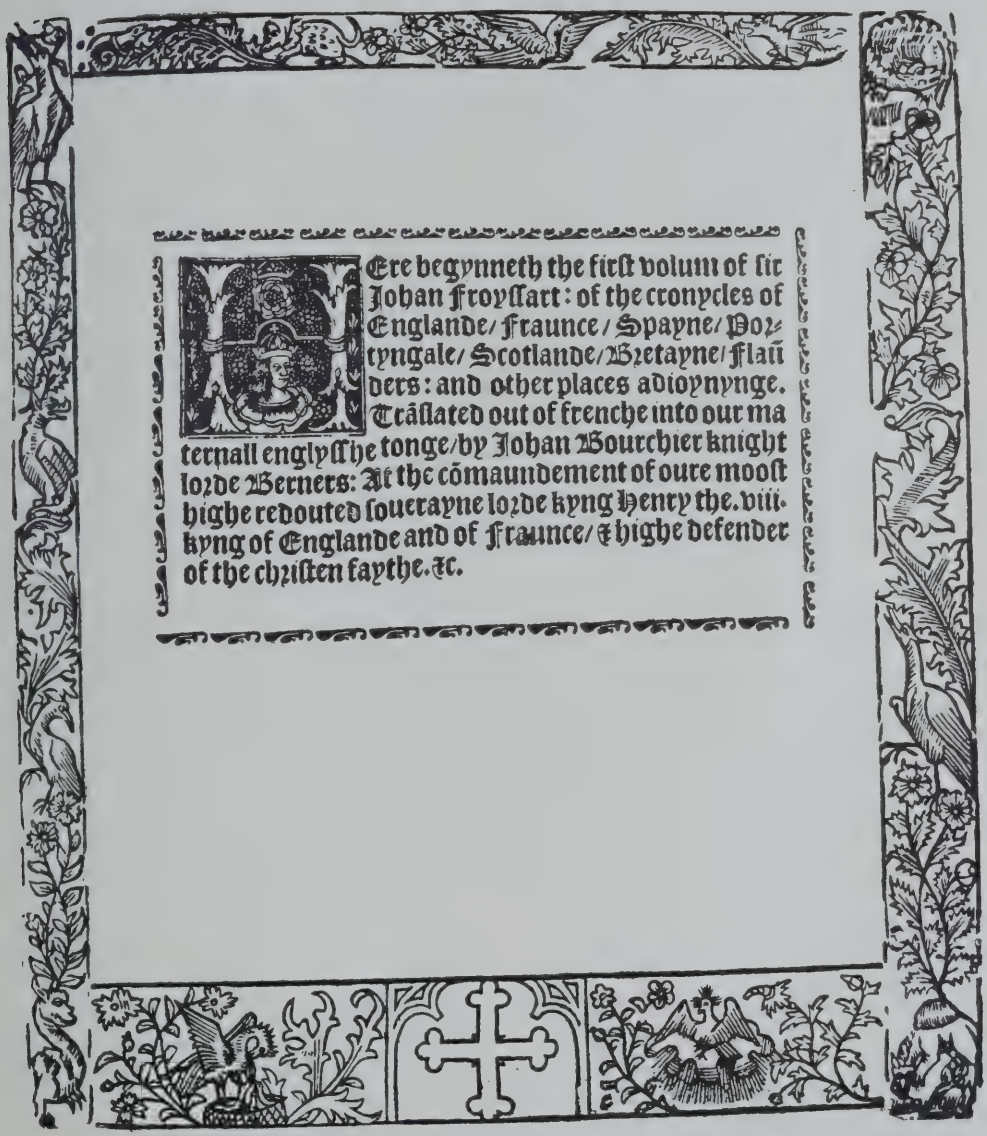
In 1518 he was joined with Kite, Archbishop of Armagh, in a mission to Spain, nominally to congratulate Charles V. on his accession, but in reality to conclude an alliance, which proved not to be feasible. He shone at the Field of Cloth of Gold, and was shortly afterwards made Governor of Calais, holding which post he died in 1532, having never forfeited his capricious master's favour. His literary activity seems to have been entirely manifested during the period of his government. Its product consisted of translations, one of which, that of the Spaniard Guevara's *Dial of Princes*, is of great literary significance, but will be best considered at a later date, along with the euphuism of which it was the parent in England. The others are translations of French and Spanish romances, which, especially that of Sir Huon of Bordeaux, possess much literary merit, but are of minor importance compared with that of Froissart's *Chronicles*, undertaken by command of Henry VIII., so noble and spirited, and, while reasonably faithful, at the same time so idiomatic, that, in rendering a French classic, Berners has enriched his country with an English one. The preciousness of the gift will be appreciated by all acquainted with Froissart, the modern Herodotus for the inimitable charm of perfect simplicity of mind and speech, the delineator of chivalry at its most gorgeous period, to whom all history was a romance and every warrior an ideal knight, and who possessed above all men the gift of describing like an eye witness what he had never beheld. The following scene was not witnessed by him, the description is entirely made up from the reports of others, and yet who can quite believe that Froissart was not there ?

Thomas Linacre

After an original water-colour drawing

The End of a Long Rivalry.

After this great discomfiture, the lords of England and Brittany returned and left the chase to their people: then there drew to the Earl of Mountfort, Sir John Chandos, Sir Robert Knolles, and divers others, and so came to a hedge side, and there they unarmed

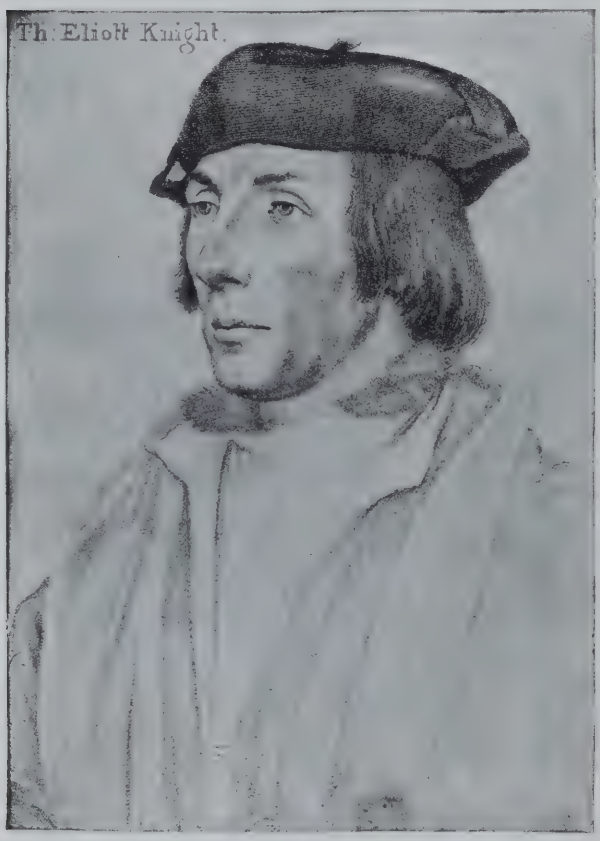

Here begynneth the fyrst volum of sir Johan froyssart: of the cronycles of Englande/ fraunce/ spayne/ Portyngale/ Scotlande/ Bretayne/ Flaūders: and other places adioynynge. Trāslated out of frenche into our maternall englysshe tonge/ by Johan Bourchier knight lorde Berners: At the cōmaundement of oure moost highe redouted souerayne lorde kyng Henry the. viii. kyng of Englande and of fraunce/ & highe defender of the chrysten fayth. &c.

Title-page of the first volume of Lord Berners' "Froissart," 1523

them, for they saw well the journey[1] was theirs; and certain of them set their banners and standards on the hedge, and the banner with the arms of Brittany on a bush, to draw their people thither. Then Sir John Chandos, Sir Robert Knolles, and other knights drew them to the Earl Mountfort, and smiling said to him, "Sir, laud God, and make

[1] Day.

good cheer, for ye have this day conquered the heritage of Bretagne." Then the Earl inclined himself right courteously, and said openly that every man might hear: "Ah, Sir John Chandos, this good adventure that is thus fallen to me is by the great wit and prowess that is in you, the which I know well and so do all those that be here. Sir, I pray you drink with me:" and took him a flagon of wine whereof he had drunk and refreshed him before, and moreover I said, "Sir, beside God, I ought to you the most thanks of any creature living." And therewith came to them Sir Oliver of Clisson, forchased[1] and inflamed, for he had long pursued his enemies, so he had much pain to return again with his people, and brought with him many a prisoner. Then he came to the Earl of Mountfort, and alighted from his horse, and refreshed him. And in the same mean season there came to them two knights and two heralds, who had searched among the dead bodies to see if Sir Charles of Blois were dead or not. Then they said all openly, "Sir, make good cheer, for we have seen your adversary Sir Charles dead." Therewith the Earl of Mountfort arose, and said that he would go and see him, for he had as good will to see him dead as alive, and thither he went, and the knights that were about him. And when he was come to the place where he lay aside, covered under a shield, he caused him to be uncovered, and regarded him right piteously, and studied a certain space, and said, "Ah, Sir Charles, fair cousin, how that by your opinion[2] many a great mischief has fallen in Brittany, as God help me, it sore displeaseth me to find you thus; howbeit it can be none otherwise." And therewith he began to weep: then Sir John Chandos drew him back, and said, "Sir, depart hence, and thank God of the fair adventure that is fallen to you, for without the death of this man ye could not come to the heritage of Bretagne." Then the Earl ordained that Sir Charles of Blois should be borne to Guingamp; and so he was incontinent with great reverence, and there buried honourably, as it appertained, for he was a good, true and valiant knight, and his body after sanctified by the grace of God, and called Saint Charles, and canonised by Pope Urban V.; for he did, and yet doth many fair miracles daily.



Sir Thomas Elyot

From an engraving by Bartolozzi after a drawing by Holbein

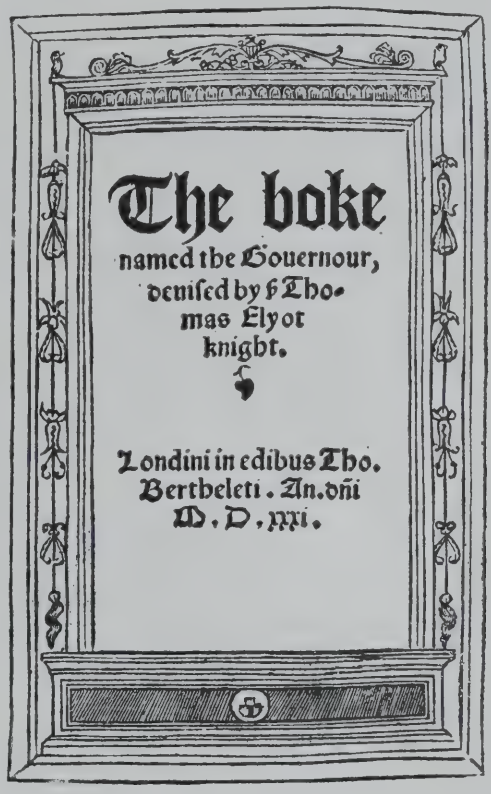
This is not quite authentic. Charles was believed to have worked miracles, and the Pope seemed disposed to canonise him; but his successful rival, fearing the obloquy of having killed a saint, interposed, and nothing was done.

[1] Spent with fatigue of the chase.

[2] Notwithstanding that by your claim to the duchy.

Christian and Saracen.

The Christian men would gladly have taken some Saracen to the intent to have known the state of their town and country, but for all their skirmishing they could never get none. The Saracens took good heed to themselves, and did pavesse[1] themselves against the crossbows Genoese: they were not so well armed as the Christian men, it was not their usage, nor had they no armourers, nor metals to forge hammers withal, for most commonly they lack iron and steel: they be ever armed in leather, and bear targets about their necks covered and made of cure boly[2] of Cappadoce; no weapon can pierce it an the leather be not hot, so that when they come near to their enemies they cast their darts all at once; and when the Genoese do shoot at them, then they couch themselves low and cover themselves with their targets, and when the shot is past, they cast again their feathered darts. Thus the space of nine weeks during the siege they oftentimes skirmished. so that divers were hurt on both sides, and specially such as lightly without avisement adventured themselves. Thus the Christian men took good heed to themselves and so did the Saracens on their part, and the lords of France and such other as were come thither to their aid, gladly regarded the dealings of the Saracens. To say the truth, to lords of estate and to great men all novelties are delectable, and if the Christian men had pleasure to behold them, the Saracens had as great pleasure to regard the manner of the Christian men. Among them there were young lusty knights, who had great pleasure to behold the armour, banners, standards, and pennons, with richness and nobleness that was among the Christian men, and at night when they were at their lodgings they spoke and devised.



Title-page of Sir Thomas Elyot's "The Gouvernour," 1531

Sir Thomas Elyot (1490?–1546) was an intimate friend of More, and, like him, affords a striking instance of the wide culture and various information of the eminent men at the court of Henry VIII. He was the son of a judge, Sir Richard Elyot. In his youth he studied medicine, which enabled him to write in mature years a medical work entitled *The Castle of Health*, which, not as unorthodox but as proceeding from a layman, was esteemed a grievous scandal by the Faculty. He was successively clerk of assize to his father, clerk of the privy council, ambassador on two occasions to Charles V., high sheriff, and Member of Parliament. He compiled a Latin-

[1] Provide themselves with *pavises*, *i.e.*, large shields.
[2] Leather hardened by boiling, *cuir bouilli*.

English dictionary, and was active as a translator of moral and political works from various languages, but his reputation rests upon his *Governour* (1531). Even this treatise is to a considerable extent borrowed from Patrizi's *De Regno et Regis Institutione* (1518). It has, however, a wider scope, treating not merely of the education befitting a chief ruler, but of that befitting all persons of condition who may be called upon to act as governors. It thus throws much light on the general intellectual and social condition of England in the author's time, and for this, rather than for its precepts, it is still valuable. It is nevertheless a work of great good sense, though sometimes amusingly pedantic, as when the writer observes that there is much good in chess, but would be much more if players would give their attention to the moralisation of the game, instead of merely trying to win it, as they commonly do, such is the infirmity of human nature! The following passage reiterates a complaint of educationalists in all ages:

Bishop Gardiner

From an engraving after S. Harding

> The second occasion wherefrom gentlemen's children seldom have sufficient learning is avarice. For when their parents will not adventure to send them far out of their proper countries, partly for fear of death, which perchance dare not approach them at home with their father; partly for expense of money, which they suppose would be less in their own homes or in a village, with some of their tenants or friends, having seldom any regard to the teacher, whether he be well learned or ignorant. For if they hire a scholar to teach in their houses they chiefly inquire with how small a salary he will be contented, and never do insearch how much good learning he hath, and how among well learned men he is therein esteemed, using therein less diligence than in taking servants, whose service is of less importance, and to a good schoolmaster is not in profit to be compared. A gentleman, ere he take a cook into his service, he will first diligently examine him, how many sorts of meats, potages and sauces he can perfectly make, and how well he can season them, that they may be both pleasant and nourishing; yes, and if it be but a falconer, he will scrupulously inquire what skill he hath in feeding, called diet, and keeping of his hawk from all sickness, also how he can redeem her and prepare her to flight. And to such a cook or falconer, whom he findeth expert, he spareth not to give much wages with other bounteous rewards. But of a schoolmaster, to whom he will commit his child to be fed with learning and instructed in virtue, whose life shall be the principal monument of his name and honour, he never maketh further enquiries but where he may have a schoolmaster, and with how little charge: and if one be perchance founden well learned, but he will not take pains to teach without he may have a great salary, he then speaketh nothing more, or else saith, What shall so much wages be given to a schoolmaster which would keep me two servants?

It is noteworthy that the above was written near the beginning of the great movement which covered England with grammar schools. *The Governour* has been admirably edited by the late Mr. Croft, who has greatly increased its value by his annotations and illustrative citations.

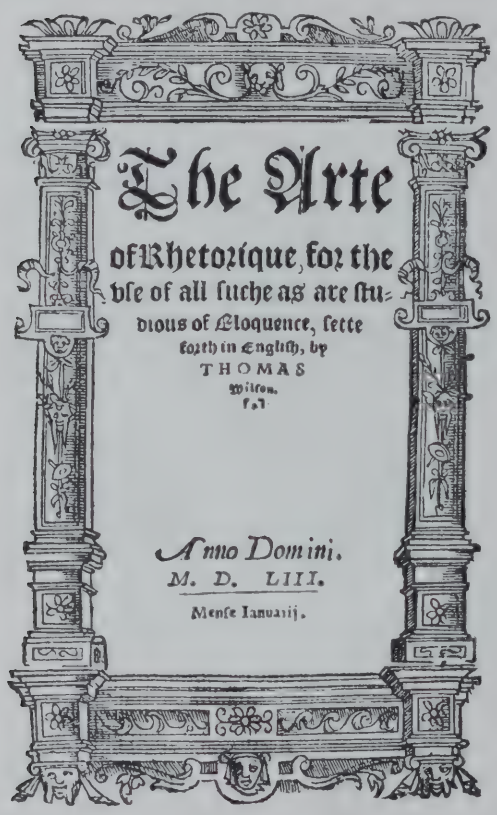
Along with Elyot may be named two men chiefly eminent as politicians and educational reformers, though not destitute of merit as authors. SIR JOHN CHEKE (1514–1557) was tutor and afterwards Secretary of State to Edward VI., and may be enumerated among the Protestant martyrs under Mary, for although he seemed to have saved his life by recantation, remorse for his want of firmness shortened his days. His great merit, however, was his introduction of Greek studies into Cambridge in his quality of Regius Professor. The English system of pronouncing Greek was introduced and established by him, in spite of the violent opposition of Bishop Gardiner. His principal English work is political, *The Hurt of Sedition* (1549). THOMAS WILSON (1525) was like Cheke a scholar and a Secretary of State, but held office in the less perilous days of Elizabeth, having narrowly escaped martyrdom from the Inquisition at Rome. As Cheke reformed the study of Greek, so Wilson sought to correct the prevalent vices of English diction, in discourse as well as in books, by his *Art of Rhetoric* (1553) : a useful treatise in its day, and now interesting in retrospect, but not distinguished by remarkable power or originality. He also wrote *The Rule of Reason, or Art of Logique* (1551). He was ambassador to Portugal and the Netherlands, and strove to thwart Spain in both capacities. His fine translation of the Philippics and Olynthiacs of Demosthenes taught England by the example of Athens and Philip of Macedon, how to deal with Philip of Spain.

Sir John Cheke

From Holland's "Heroologia," 1620

Roger Ascham—(1514–1568)—born in Yorkshire of a substantial yeoman's family in 1514, was one of the chief writers of his age, and his services to both English literature and English education are imperishable. Yet he is probably better known to the world at present by the one passage in his *Schoolmaster* in which he describes Lady Jane Grey studying Plato's *Phaedo* than by all the rest of his writings. There, and there only, he takes hold of the imagination: his literary work had, in general, a practical end which it accomplished so perfectly that nothing was left to keep it before the minds of the next generation. His championship of English as a literary medium

against Latin does him high honour, but ere long every one a reed with him. His prose style was in his own day an invaluable example to his contemporaries how to treat ordinary matters without bombast or pretension, but speedily became one instance among many. The very soundness of his educational views has made them commonplace through general acceptance; the interest of his work on archery, vital at the time of its composition, is now merely antiquarian. If, however, his influence has departed, his charm remains; he cannot be read anywhere without pleasure. His works reflect his history, the life of a man dear to all and honoured by all, at the cost, it may be, of some compliances which one would not judge with too much severity. In his youth he had stood by Sir John Cheke in the reformation of University studies, especially Greek; yet in after years he owed to the intercession of Cheke's opponent, Bishop Gardiner, the post of secretary to Queen Mary with the unheard of privilege of remaining a Protestant. He had previously been tutor to the Princess Elizabeth, and may claim a large share of the merit of forming her mind, as well as adorning it with accomplishments. After her accession he was again in confidential relations with her, and had ample experience both of her partiality and her parsimony. He died in 1568, while writing his *Schoolmaster*.


The Arte
of Rhetorique, for the
vse of all suche as are stu-
dious of Eloquence, sette
forth in English, by
THOMAS
Wilson.
Anno Domini.
M. D. LIII.
Mense Ianuarij.

Title-page of Wilson's "Arte of Rhetorique," 1553

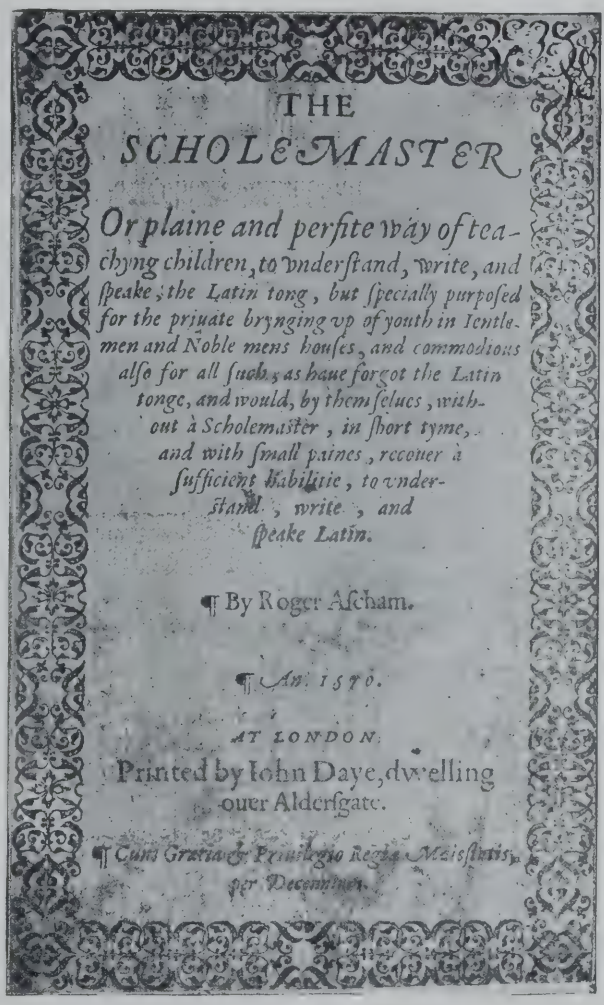
Ascham's literary reputation rests upon this work, upon his *Toxophilus*, and upon his unique position as the first English exemplar of polished epistolary composition. The *Toxophilus*, written in 1543 and 1544, has still value as a practical treatise on archery, but now that archery has become a mere pastime is chiefly remarkable as a monument of the system of national defence in Tudor times, prototype of the Volunteer movement in our own, and as symbolising that close alliance between learning and manly sport which has always characterised English education. It takes, nevertheless, a wider range, and exhibits Ascham in a favourable light as the practical and impressive moralist :—

> Take heed, therefore, ye great ones in the court, yea, though ye be the greatest of all, take heed what ye do; take heed how ye live; for as ye great ones use to do, so all mean men love to do. You be indeed makers or marrers of all men's manners within the realm. For though God has placed you to be chief in making of laws, to bear greatest authority, to command all others; yet God doth order that all your laws, all your authority, all your commandments do not half so much with mean men as doth your example

and manner of living. And for example, even in the greatest matter, if you yourselves do serve God gladly and orderly for conscience sake, not coldly, and sometime for manner sake, you carry all the court with you, and the whole realm beside, earnestly and orderly to do the same. If you do otherwise, you be the only authors of all misorder in religion, not only to the Court, but to all England beside. Infinite shall be made cold by your example that were never hurt by reading of books.

The form of *Toxophilus* is a dialogue, which may well have given a hint to Izaak Walton. It has nothing of Walton's poetical charm, but is not unenlivened by humour. In speaking of the proper kind of feather for fledging arrows, Ascham after observing that peacock's feathers, though sometimes "taken up for pleasure," are apt to be "laid down for profit," and that eagles' feathers may do extremely well for Hercules, breaks out into the panegyric of a humbler fowl:—

> Well fare the gentle goose, which bringeth to a man, even to his door, so many exceeding commodities. For the goose is a man's comfort in war and in peace, sleeping and waking. What praise soever is given to shooting, the goose may challenge the best part in it.


THE
SCHOLEMASTER
Or plaine and perfite way of teachyng children, to vnderſtand, write, and ſpeake, the Latin tong, but ſpecially purpoſed for the priuate brynging vp of youth in Ientlemen and Noble mens houſes, and commodious alſo for all ſuch, as haue forgot the Latin tonge, and would, by themſelues, without a Scholemaſter, in ſhort tyme, and with ſmall paines, recouer a ſufficient habilitie, to vnderſtand, write, and ſpeake Latin.
¶ By Roger Aſcham.
¶ An. 1570.
AT LONDON
Printed by Iohn Daye, dwelling ouer Aldersgate.
¶ Cum Gratia & Priuilegio Regiæ Maieſtatis per Decennium.

Title-page of Ascham's "Schoolmaster"

Ascham's *Schoolmaster* grew out of a conversation on the case of some Eton boys who had run away from school to escape a flogging. It naturally has much to say on the advantage of gentle methods in education, where the writer displays an enlightened spirit in advance of his time. The technical portion is equally judicious, he deprecates overburdening the mind with grammatical rules which must fail to interest the youthful imagination, and recommends constant exercise in translation in their place. Almost all his educational precepts have found acceptance—the width of view by

which he considers education as embracing not merely school learning, but all culture of mind and body, is perhaps even more in advance of our day than of his own. When, however, he ascends from the schoolboy to the poet he offers a pregnant illustration of the maxim *ne sutor ultra crepidam.* Treating of prosody, he expresses a fervent aspiration that Englishmen "would acknowledge and understand rightfully our rude beggarly rhyming, brought into Italy by Goths and Huns, when all good verse and all good learning too were destroyed by them."[1] To employ rhyme in his own more enlightened day, he thinks, "were even to eat acorns with swine, when we may freely eat wheat bread amongst men." He admits, indeed, that "*carmen hexametrum* doth rather trot and hobble than run smoothly in our English tongue. Yet I am sure our English tongue will receive *carmen iambicum.*" If he means the blank verse introduced by Surrey, he is so far right; but Surrey would have looked blanker than his verse at a proposal to rewrite his lyrics in it.

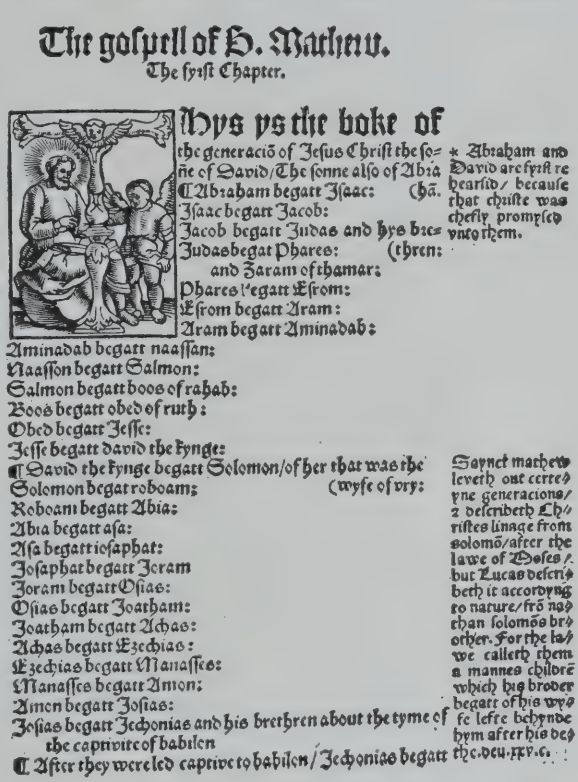
Lady Jane Grey, a pupil of Ascham's
From Holland's "Heroologia," 1620

Ascham's pedantry on this point is the more surprising as he had given proof of his superiority to erudite prejudice by preferring, when sure of being understood, English to Latin as the medium of his correspondence. Whether in English or in Latin his letters are always excellent; in the latter equal to the best of his time; in the former he for a long time stands alone. Between 1550 and 1553 he was engaged on a mission to Germany, and his descriptions of Rhineland scenery bring it vividly before the eye.

By much the most important English literary undertaking of the age was the translation of the Bible from the original tongues, forming a great advance upon the Wycliffite versions from the Vulgate. It will be convenient to defer notice of this until we are enabled to consider the subject as a whole upon arriving at the authorised version of 1611, but something should be said here of the two men principally connected with it in the age of Henry VIII., one of whom ranks among the foremost Englishmen of his age. This, it hardly need be added, was WILLIAM TYNDALE (1490–1536), a man of the highest and purest character, of Greek and even Hebrew scholarship adequate to his great task, and endowed with such natural taste and power of diction as to be justly

[1] So Cobbett in the *Rejected Addresses:* "The gewgaw fetters of rhyme, invented by the monks in the middle ages to enslave the people."

credited with the highest merit of all who have contributed to the matchless beauty of the English Bible. His personal share in the work was the translation of the New Testament, the Pentateuch and the Book of Jonah, but he is believed to have made other translations which did not see the light. After his martyrdom his mantle fell in a measure upon MILES COVERDALE (1488–1568), afterwards for a time Bishop of Exeter, but who from conscientious motives renounced the see. Coverdale could not, like Tyndale, have recourse to the original tongues, but his felicity of language added much to the merit of the version as ultimately settled. He is also entitled to the highest credit for his assiduous promotion of the cause until the translation was at length provisionally adopted by royal authority: and even if the offences of Henry's unhappy minister Cromwell were as black as they have sometimes been represented, it may be deemed sufficient atonement that the expense of the Great Bible of 1539 was wholly borne by him. The numerous literary and bibliographical questions involved in this most interesting history must be reserved for the present. Coverdale was not like Tyndale a man of heroic mould, but has been justly characterised as "pious, conscientious, laborious, generous, and thoroughly honest and good." The vast advance which a nation may make in a short time is strikingly illustrated by two proclamations of Henry VIII., the first forbidding the Scriptures to be read in the vernacular, the second ordering a copy of the English Bible to be placed in every parish church.



The gospell of S. Mathew.
The fyrst Chapter.

Thys ys the boke of the generacio of Jesus Christ the sone of Savid/The sonne also of Abra-
¶ Abraham begatt Isaac: (ham.
Isaac begatt Jacob:
Jacob begatt Judas and hys bre-
Judas begat Phares: (thren:
and Zaram of thamar:
Phares begatt Esrom:
Esrom begatt Aram:
Aram begatt Aminadab:
Aminadab begatt naasson:
Naasson begatt Salmon:
Salmon begatt boos of rahab:
Boos begatt obed of ruth:
Obed begatt Jesse:
Jesse begatt david the kynge:
¶ David the kynge begatt Solomon/of her that was the
Solomon begat roboam: (wyfe of vry:
Roboam begatt Abia:
Abia begatt asa:
Asa begatt iosaphat:
Josaphat begatt Joram
Joram begatt Osias:
Osias begatt Joatham:
Joatham begatt Achas:
Achas begatt Ezechias:
Ezechias begatt Manasses:
Manasses begatt Amon:
Amon begatt Josias:
Josias begatt Jechonias and his brethren about the tyme of the captyvite of babilon
¶ After they were led captive to babilon/ Jechonias begatt

* Abraham and David are fyrst re hearsid/ because that christe was chefly promysed vnto them.

Sayncte matheu leveth out certe ine generacions/ and describeth Christes linage from solomō/after the lawe of Moses/ but Lucas describeth it accordyng to nature/frō nathan solomōs brother. For the lawe calleth them a mannes childrē which his broder begatt of his wyfe lefte behynde hym after his dethe. deu. xxv. c.

The first page of Tyndale's Gospel of St. Matthew

From the New Testament printed at Cologne, 1525

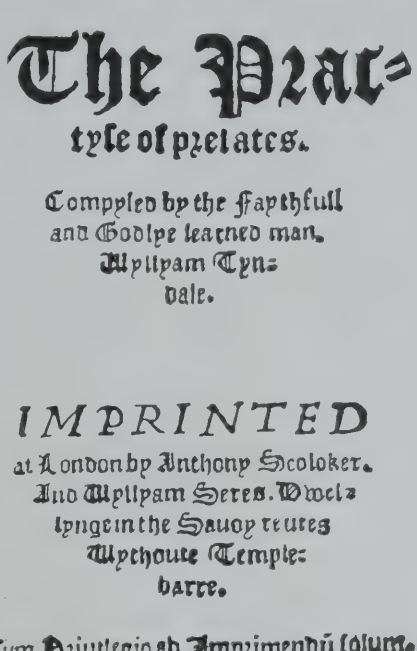
The age of Henry VIII. could not fail to abound in works of religious controversy, many of which may in point of composition be classed among the best writings of the time, but to which no great amount of space can be devoted in our pages. If, as usually believed, ARCHBISHOP CRANMER was the author or translator of a large portion of the Prayer Book, he surpassed every contemporary in beauty of diction, but his acknowledged writings are not very important. Next to him in distinction comes William Tyndale, whose

contributions to the Reformation controversy are of great moment. In his *Parable of the Wicked Mammon* (1528) he betrays, like Wycliffe, a leaning towards socialistic views, but does not carry them to any alarming extent. *The Obedience of a Christian Man* defends the Reformers from the charge of disobedience to magistrates, and upholds the royal authority so strongly as to have gained the marked approbation of Henry VIII., which Tyndale forfeited by his next work, *The Practise of Prelates* (1530), in which he condemned the royal divorce. His latter years were distinguished by a controversy with More, conducted with equal ability and equal scurrility on both sides. The excitement under which all participants in religious strife laboured in this age undoubtedly did much to stimulate energy of composition, and was sometimes productive of real eloquence. It would be difficult to find better specimens of manly, nervous English than Bishop Ponet's translation of Ochino's *Divine Tragedy* (1549) on one side, or Bishop Fisher's *St. Paul's Sermon against Luther* (1521) on the other. The only writer of the class, however, who can be held to have gained a permanent place in literature, apart from controversy, is another Bishop, a martyr like Fisher, but on the opposite side, Hugh Latimer (1485?–1555). His claim to literary celebrity does not rest upon literary ability, but on a style uncommon in his day, and which few but himself would then have ventured to employ from the pulpit, homely, quaint, racy, brimful of humour so well controlled as never to verge upon buffoonery. An excellent example is the well-known passage in which he seeks to shame idle prelates by the salutary example of the devil :—

William Tyndale
From Holland's "Heroologia," 1620

> But here some man will say to me, "What, Sir, are ye so privy of the devil's counsel that ye know all this to be true?" Truth I know him too well, and have obeyed him a little too much in condescending to some follies. And I know him as other men do, that he is ever occupied and ever busy in following his plough. I know it by St. Peter, which saith of him, *Sicut leo rugiens circuit quaerens quem devoret.* . . He goeth about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. I would have this text well viewed and examined, every word of it. *Circuit*, he goeth about in every corner of his diocese. He goeth on visitation daily. He leaveth no place of his cure unvisited. He walketh round about from

place to place and ceaseth not. *Sicut leo* as a lion ; that is, strongly, boldly, and proudly, straightly and fiercely, with haut looks, with his proud countenance, with his stately braggings. *Rugiens*, roaring, for he letteth not slip any occasion to speak or to roar out when he seeth his time. *Quaerens*, he goeth about seeking and not sleeping, as our bishops do, but he seeketh diligently, he searcheth diligently all corners whereas he may have his prey, he roveth abroad in every place of his diocese, he standeth not still, he is never at rest, but ever in hand with his plough that it may go forward. But there was never such a preacher in England as he is.


The Prac-
tyse of prelates.

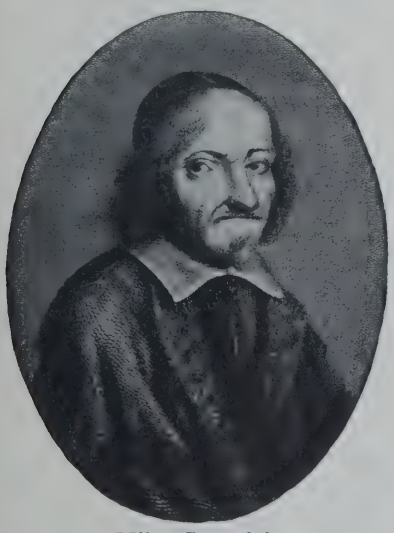
Compyled by the faythfull
and Godlye learned man.
Wyllyam Tyn-
dale.

IMPRINTED
at London by Anthony Scoloker.
And Wyllyam Seres. Dwel-
lynge in the Sauoy reuers
Wythoute Temple-
barre.

Cum Priuilegio ad Imprimendū solum.

Title-page of Tyndale's "Practice of Prelates"

History and political science, though doubtless much meditated upon, were little written upon in the days of the early Tudors. The latter was a perilous subject, but it certainly might have been expected that some historian would have arisen ; yet the history of England was left to an eminent Italian then resident among us, Polydore Vergil, and no chronicler even appears except the worthy Fabyan and Hall, who will be considered with other chroniclers of a later date. Politics and history were nevertheless united in some measure by the Welshman WILLIAM THOMAS, who, in 1554, "constrained by misfortune to abandon the place of his nativity," proceeded to Italy, and turned his travels to account by producing a compendium of Italian history, especially designed to show England "how a nation that had been enriched by peace and concord had been made poor by strife," but even more remarkable as an antiquarian guide, and especially for the writer's meditations among the ruins of Rome. Thomas also wrote the first Italian grammar for English use, combined with a dictionary. Upon the news of the death of Henry VIII. arriving at Bologna Thomas represents himself as drawn into a discussion with some Italian gentlemen respecting the character of the deceased monarch. His apology for his sovereign, drawn up by himself under the title of *The Pilgrim*, was issued at the time in Italian, but the English original remained unpublished until long



Miles Coverdale
From an engraving by Trotter

afterwards. To the fourteen counts of the indictment brought by the Italians against Henry, Thomas replies with a spirit and force which entitle him to an honourable place among the good prose writers of his time, and, having refuted them one by one, he winds up with a glowing panegyric :—

> Prudent he was in counsel and forecasting, most liberal in rewarding his faithful servants, and ever unto his enemies as it behoveth a prince to be. He was learned in all sciences, and had the gift of many tongues ; he was a perfect theologian, a good philosopher and a strong man at arms ; a jeweller, a perfect builder of fortresses as well as of pleasant palaces, and from one to another there was no necessary kind of knowledge from a king's degree to a carter's but that he had an honest sight in it. He was undoubtedly the rarest man that lived in his time. But I say not this to make him a god, nor in all his doings I will not say he hath been a saint. I will confess that he did many evil things as the publican sinner, but not as a cruel tyrant, or as a pharisaical hypocrite ; for all his doings were open to the whole world, wherein he governed himself with so much reason, prudence, courage and circumspection, that I wot not where in all the histories I have read to find one king equal to him.

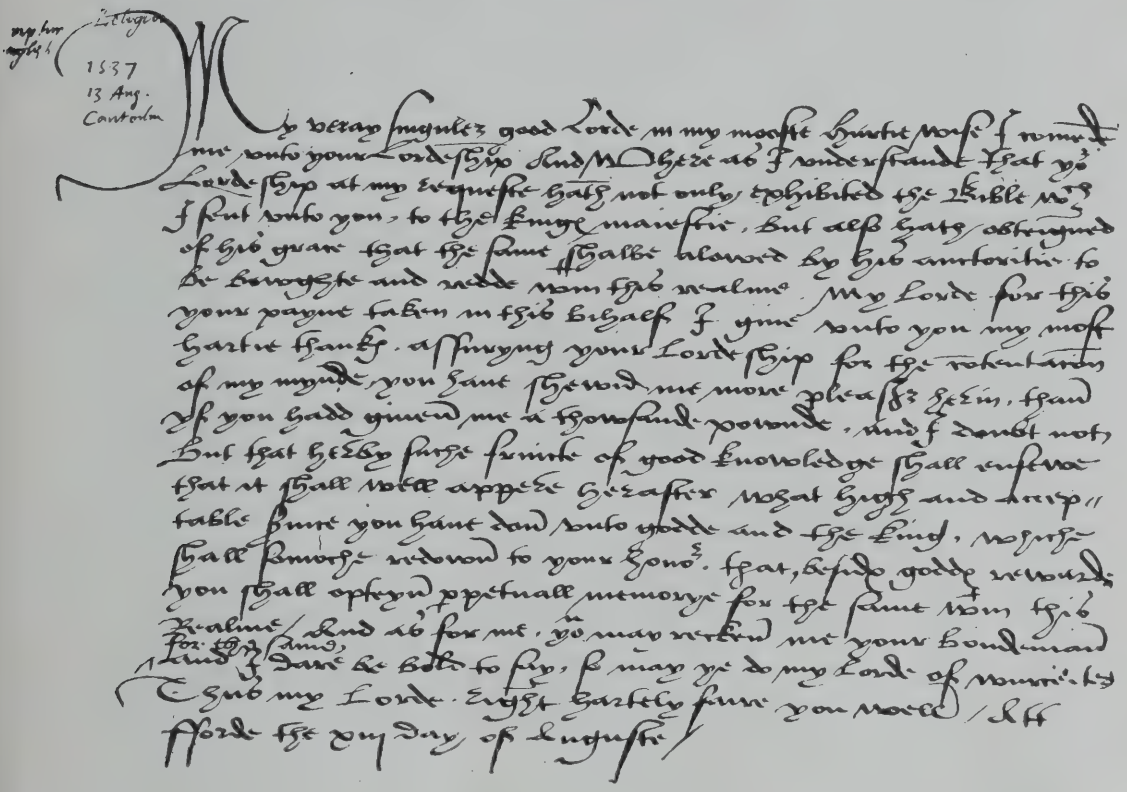
Thomas Cranmer

After the portrait by G. Fliccius

The Pilgrim also contains interesting information respecting the English export of woollen goods, the so-called Flemish cloth being, Thomas says, all made in England ; of coal, which he calls a *metal ;* and of beer, which, having according to the rhyme come into England not long before, was then streaming out again. Returning to England, Thomas was made a clerk to the Privy Council, but perished in the Wyatt insurrection of the following year, protesting that he died for his country.

The death of Sir Thomas More may in some respects well be compared to the death of Socrates, and, to complete the parallel, it found a Crito and a Phædo in the narrative of his son-in-law, WILLIAM ROPER (1496–1578), the only biographical writer of any account who wrote under Henry VIII., as no doubt he did, although his work was not published until 1626. Not only in the pathetic description of More's death, to which reference has been made, but everywhere it is a model of good taste and good feeling. The author

was prothonotary of the Court of King's Bench, which office his amiable disposition and caution in his dealings with the ruling powers enabled him to



Autograph Letter from Cranmer to Thomas Cromwell

British Museum MS. Cleopatra, E. 5

preserve until his death, notwithstanding his adherence to the ancient religion.

It would be impossible to omit the name of JOHN LELAND, the antiquary (1506?–1552), for few writers of Henry VIII.'s time have laid posterity under more substantial obligations. He can hardly, however, claim to rank as a

man of letters, for the collections he had laboriously amassed in nine years' perlustration of England were never digested into the great work on the *History and Antiquities of the Nation* which he contemplated. His *Itinerary* and his *Collectanea* or assemblage of miscellaneous notes were, however, published at Oxford in the eighteenth century by a kindred spirit, Thomas Hearne. He has been called "the father of English antiquaries," and few of his posterity have excelled him.

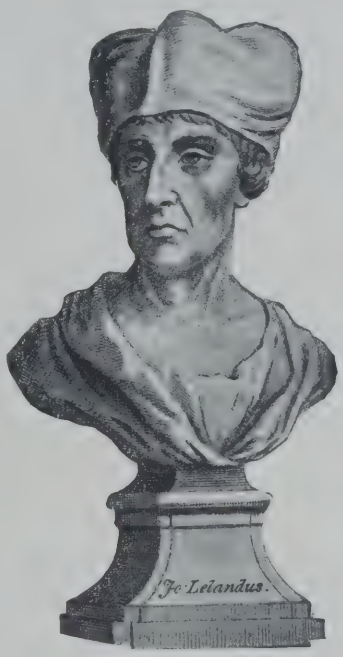
Hugh Latimer

After the portrait in the National Portrait Gallery

Near the beginning of Henry VIII.'s reign, and for some time afterwards, the surveyor of the field of English poetry might have reported with Porson at an equally dull period, "Poetis nos laetamur tribus." No particular resemblance can be traced between Stephen Hawes and Alexander Barclay on the one hand and Pye and "parvus Pybus" on the other; but the affinity between **John Skelton** and Peter Pindar is anything but fanciful. Like Peter Pindar, Skelton claims a place in literature in virtue of sheer vigour and originality. He is little of a poet, and it probably cost him little to throw aside the traditions which had come down from a poetical age, but by so doing he distinguishes himself from his feeble contemporaries, and might have claimed to rank as the first English satiric poet if his lampoons had attained the dignity of satire. His early history seems at variance with his later career. Born about 1460, he began by writing an elegy on Edward IV., became a noted scholar at Oxford, making translations from the Latin which have not been published, was one of Henry VIII.'s tutors in his childhood, was rewarded with the living of Diss in Norfolk, and straightway became a clerical Bohemian, a thorn in his bishop's side, but also a poet. The probability is that he had always lived a free life, and could not accustom himself to the decorum incumbent upon a parish priest. A collection of jests and practical jokes attributed to him, though not one may be authentic, sufficiently indicate his general repute. He, notwithstanding, held his ground, partly perhaps from the favour of the King, for whose amusement he is said to have written his scurrilous verses on Sir Christopher Garneys, and his humorous but extravagantly coarse *Tunning of Eleanor Rummyng*. At length, however, for some unexplained provocation, he took to lampoon-

ing Wolsey, whom he assailed in his *Colin Clout, Why Come Ye not to Court?* and *Speak Parrot.* Wolsey seems to have shown more long-suffering than could have been expected, but at last Skelton was obliged to seek sanctuary in Westminster, where he died in 1529.

Although the strictly poetical value of Skelton's work is small, he commands respect by his rude vigour and his opulence of ideas. He has more to say than he knows how to express, and in the effort to deliver himself hits upon a short metre which no one had used before him, perilously near doggerel but not entirely unworthy of the praise awarded to it by the elder Disraeli: "In the quick-returning rhymes, the playfulness of the diction, and the pungency of new words, usually ludicrous, often expressive, and sometimes felicitous, there is a stirring spirit which will be best felt in an audible reading." It is difficult to render this description of poetry any justice by quotation, for the affluence of the bard's ideas and the facility of his metre combine to render him interminable. In *Philip Sparrow*, the lament of a nun for the death of her pet, foully slaughtered by a cat (a theme handled with more brevity in the Greek Anthology), the lady having once remarked that she is unable to do justice to her subject for lack of learning, confirms the assertion by naming half the authors of repute who had flourished down to Skelton's time. The following is but a fragment of the Kehama-like imprecation pronounced upon Philip's murderer, the maleficent cat:—



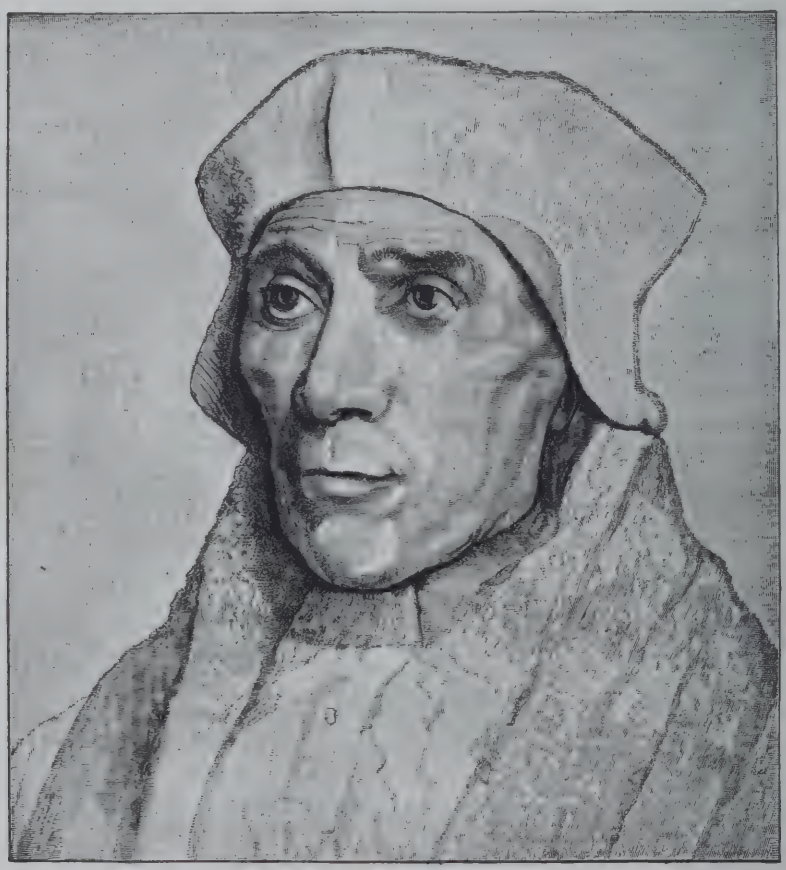
John Leland

After an engraving by Grignion of the bust at All Souls

Of Inde the greedy grypes[1]
Might tear out all thy tripes!
Of Arcady the bears
Might pluck away thine ears!
The wild wolf Lycaon
Bite asunder thy back bone!
Of Etna the burning hill
That day and night burneth still,
Set in thy tail a blaze,
That all the world may gaze
And wonder upon thee,
From Ocean the great sea
Unto the Isle of Orcady,
From Tilbury ferry
To the plain of Salisbury!
So traitorously my bird to kill
That never wrought thee evil will!

[1] Griffins.

It is not remarkable that the author of reams of verse of this description, much of it the vehicle of the grossest personal abuse, should have passed with the next generation for "a rude, railing rhymer." Skelton has, nevertheless, the merit of being always racy when others are insipid, and may be fairly regarded as a rough prototype of another indecorous clergyman, Churchill, with a power of picturesque personification denied to the latter. This is particularly apparent in his allegorical poem, *The Garland of Laurel*,



John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester

From a drawing by Holbein in the British Museum

on the presentation of a laurel wreath to himself, and *The Bowge* (*bouche*) *of Court*, in which the vices incidental to Court life are mercilessly satirised. There is great energy in this representation of Riot :—

With that came Riot, rushing all at once,
A rusty gallant, to-ragged and to-rent ;
And on the board he whirled a pair of bones,
Quater trêye deus he clattered as he went ;
" Now have at all, by St. Thomas of Kent."
And ever he threw and cast, I wot ne'er what.
His hair was growen thorough out his hat.

Mense Junii, Anno regni metuendissimi dñi nri regis Henrici octaui. xxii.

A proclamation made and diuysed by the kyngis highnes, With the aduise of his honorable cou-saille, for dampning of erronious bokes and hereties, and prohibityinge the dauinge of holy scripture, translated into the vulgar tonges of englisshe, frenche, or duche, in suche manner, as within this proclamation is expressed.

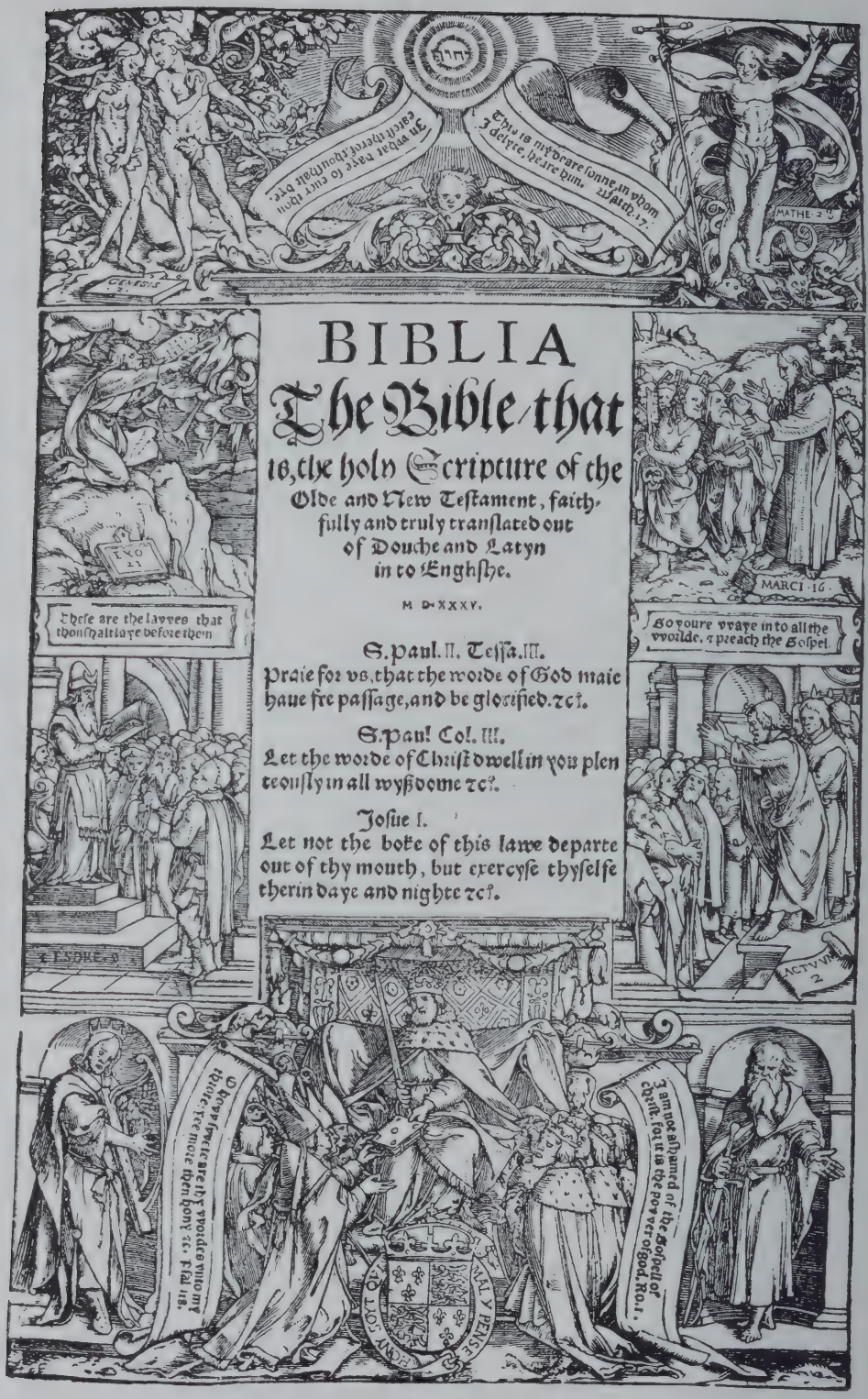
The kinge our most dradde soueraigne lorde, studienge and prouidynge daily for the weale, benefite, and honour of this his most noble realme, well and cuidently perceyueth, that partly through the malicious suggestion of our gostly enemy, partly by the euell and peruerse inclination and seditious disposition of sundry persons, diuers heresies and erronious opinions haue ben late sowen and spredde amonge his subiectes of this his said realme, by blasphemous and pestiferous englisshe bokes, printed in other regions, and sent in to this realme, to the entent as well to peruerte and withdrawe the people from the catholike and true fayth of Christe, as also to stirre and incense them to sedition and disobedience agaynst their princes, soueraignes, and heedes, as also to cause them to contempne and neglect all good lawes, customes, and vertuous maners, to the final subuersion and desolation of this noble realme, if they myght haue preuayled (whiche god forbyd) in theyr most cursed persuasions and malicious purposes. Where vpon the kynges highnes, by his incomparable wysedome, foreseinge and most prudently considerynge, hath inuited and called to hym the primates of this his gracis realme, and also a sufficient nombre of discrete vertuous and well lerned personages in diuinite, as well of either of the vniuersites, Oxforde and Cambrige, as also hath chosen and taken out of other parties of his realme: gyuinge vnto them libertie, to speke and declare playnly their aduises, iudgementes, and determinations, concernynge as well the approbation or reiectynge of suche bokes as be in any parte suspected, as also the admission and diuulgation of the olde and newe testament, translated in to englisshe. Wher vpon his highnes, in his owne royall person, callynge to hym the said primates and diuines, hath seriously and depely, with great leisure and longe deliberation, consulted, debated, inserched, and discussed the premisses: and finally, by all their free assentes, consentes, and agrementes, concluded, resolued, and determined, that these bokes ensuynge, That is to say, the boke entitled the wicked Mammona, the boke named the Obedience of a Christen man, the Supplication of beggars, and the boke called the Reuelation of Antichrist, the Sūmary of scripture, and diuers other bokes made in the englisshe tonge, and imprinted beyonde ꝑ see, do contayne in them pestiferous errours and blasphemies: and for that cause, shall from hens forth be reputed and taken of all men, for bokes of heresie, and worthy to be dampned, and put in perpetuall obliuion. The kynges said highnes therfore straitly chargeth and cōmaundeth all and euery his subiectes, of what estate or condition so euer he or they be, as they wyll auoyde his high indignacion, and most greuous displeasure, that they from hens forth, do not bye, receyue, or haue, any of the bokes before named, or any other boke, beinge in the englisshe tonge, and printed beyonde the see, of what matter so euer it be, or any copie written, drawen out of the same, or the same bokes in the frenche or duche tonge. And to the entent that his highnes wylbe asserteyned, what nombre of the sayd erronious bokes shalbe foūde fro tyme to tyme within this his realme, his highnes therfore chargeth and cōmaundeth, that all and euery person or psones, whiche hath or hereafter shall haue, any boke or bokes in the englisshe tonge, printed beyonde the see, as is afore written, or any of the sayde erronious bokes in the frenche or duche tonge: that he or they, within fyftene dayes nexte after the publisshynge of this present proclamation, do actually delyuer or sende the same bokes and euery of them, to the bisshop of the diocese, wherin he or they dwelleth, or to his cōmissary, or els before good testimonie, to theyr curate or parisshe preest, to be presented by the same curate or parisshe preest, to the sayd bisshop or his cōmissary. And so doynge, his highnes frely pardoneth and acquiteth them, and euery of them, of all penalities, forfaitures, and paynes, wherin they haue incurred or fallen, by reason of any statute, acte, ordinaunce, or proclamation before this tyme made, concernynge any offence or transgression by them committed or done, by or for the kepynge or holdynge of the sayde bokes.

Proclamation of Henry VIII. forbidding the English Bible to be used in the churches

Then I beheld how he disguised was :
His head was heavy for watching over night,
His eyen bleared, his face shone like a glass ;
His gown so short that it ne cover might
His rump, he went so all for summer light.
His hose were garded with a liste of grene,
Yet at the knees they were broken, I ween.

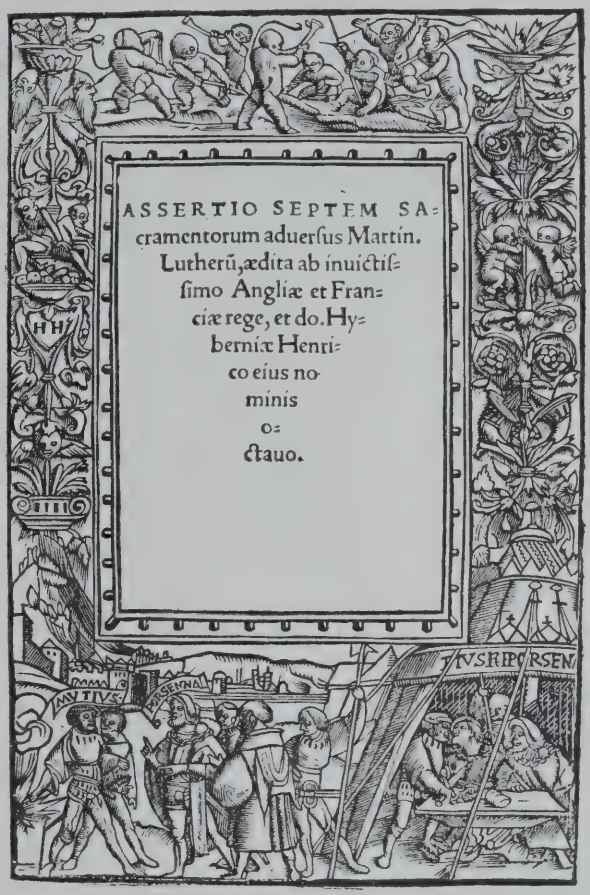
Skelton's dramatic morality, *Magnificence*, will be best considered along with the general subject of the primitive English drama.

Stephen Hawes (1475 ?—1523 ?) resembled Skelton in nothing but being


BIBLIA
The Bible/that
is,the holy Scripture of the
Olde and New Testament, faith-
fully and truly translated out
of Douche and Latyn
in to Englishe.
M D.XXXV.
S.paul. II. Tessa. III.
Praie for vs, that the worde of God maie
haue fre passage, and be glorified. &c.
S.Paul Col. III.
Let the worde of Christ dwell in you plen
teously in all wyssdome &c.
Josue I.
Let not the boke of this lawe departe
out of thy mouth, but exercyse thyselfe
therin daye and nighte &c.
These are the lawes that
thou shalt laye before them
Go youre waye in to all the
worlde, & preach the Gospel.
MARCI. 16.
I am not ashamed of the Gospell of
Christ, for it is the power of god. Ro. I.
O Lorde, thy mercie are thy workes wyde on
earth. Thy rightwesnesse is euen like the
great mightie hilles. Psal. 118.
Thou shalt not take vengeaunce nor beare any
malice against the children of thy people.
Leuit. 19.
This is my beloued sonne in whom
I delyte, heare him. Esaie. 42.
GENESIS
MATHE. 2.
ACT. VIII. 2

Title-page of the Bible of 1535

a Court poet, and a university man. Skelton is a bold innovator: Hawes writes much as Lydgate might have written if he had lived under the Tudors and gained additional refinement by study, foreign travel and employment at Court. It was while groom of the chamber to Henry VII. that Hawes produced his principal poem, *The Pastime of Pleasure* (1506), a long allegory of the course of human life, commencing under the auspices of the seven liberal studies, personified as nymphs inhabiting "The Tower of Doctrine" and, after the prescribed amount of giant-slaying and successful wooing, ending by the repulse of Old Age, Policy, and Avarice, by the aid of Contrition and Conscience. The poem is dull as a whole, but possesses some importance in literary history as a connecting link between Lydgate and Spenser, and has occasional gleams of poetry, as when the hero of the allegory leads his lady forth to dance in the tower of Music :—



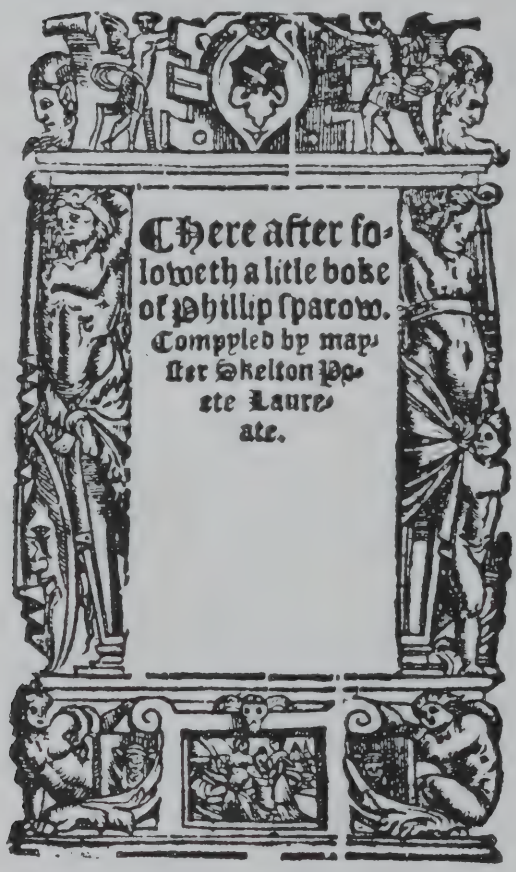
Title-page of Henry VIII.'s book against Luther

By her propre handé, soft as any silk,
With due observance I did her then take.
Her skin was white as whale's bone or milk.
My thought was ravished. I might not aslake
My burning herté, she the fire did make.
These dances truly Music hath me taught
To lute or dance, but it availeth nought.

For the fire kindled, and waxed more and more
The dancing blew it; with her beauty clear
My heart sickened and began to wax sore;
A minute six hours, and six hours a year
I thought it was, so heavy was my cheer,
And yet to cover my great love aright,
The outward countenance I made glad and light.

And for fear mine eyes should mine heart bewray,
I took my leave and to a temple went,
And all alone I to myself did say:
Alas! what fortune hath me hither sent!
To devoyde[1] my joy and my heart torment
No man can tell how great a pain it is,
But if[2] he will feel it, as I do y-wis.[3]

Hawes wrote several short prose works which are lost, or exist in only one or two printed copies. He appears to have obtained the favour of Henry VIII., and to have written a play for representation at Court about 1520. He probably died soon afterwards.



Title-page of Skelton's "Litle Boke of Phillip Sparow"

It has been much disputed whether **Alexander Barclay** (1475?–1552) was an Englishman or a Scotchman, but his name, the testimony of Scotch writers near his time and allusion, in his own works, leave litt e doubt of his Scotch origin. The circumstance of his being presented to a priesthood in the College of Ottery St. Mary, about 1506, by Bishop Cornish, who was then Provost of Oriel, suggests the probability of his having been educated at Oriel College. He would seem to have previously travelled in France and Italy. In 1509 he published his principal work, the translation, with considerable additions, of Sebastian Brant's *Narrenschiff or Ship of Fools*, then immensely popular throughout Europe; partly, as Brant's biographer thinks, from the excellence of the woodcuts, partly as the first modern example of good-humoured satire. About 1511 he became a Benedictine monk at Ely, where he wrote his eclogues about 1515. From this he passed to the Franciscan monastery at Canterbury. After the dissolution of the monasteries, acquiescing, as it would seem, in the religious changes then taking place, he was presented to benefices in Essex and Somersetshire, and died at Croydon in 1552, a few weeks after his institution to the important city rectory of All Hallows, Lombard Street.

Barclay was a prolific author, but his only writings of importance are *The Ship of Fools* (1509); *The Eclogues* (undated, but before 1520), and a translation

[1] Destroy. [2] Unless. [3] Certainly.

A proclamacion, ordeyned by the Kynges maiestie, with the aduice of his honourable counsayle for the Byble of the largest and greatest volume, to be had in euery churche. Deuised the. VI. day of May the. XXXIII. yeare of the Kynges moste gracious reygne.

WHere, by Iniunctions heretofore set forth by the auctorite of the Kynges royall maiestye, Supreme head of the churche of this his realme of Englande. It was ordeyned and commaunded amongest other thynges, that in al and synguler paryshe churches, there shuld be prouyded by a certen day nowe expyred, at the costes of the Curates and paryshioners, Bybles conteynynge the olde and newe Testament, in the Englyshe tounge, to be fyxed and set vp openlye in euery of the sayd paryshe churches. The whiche Godlye commaundement and iniunction was to the onlye intent that euery of the Kynges maiesties louynge subiectes, myndynge to reade therin, myght by occasyō therof, not only consyder and perceyue the great and ineffable omnipotent power, prouydence, iustice, mercy and goodnes of Almyghtie God. But also to learne thereby to obserue Gods commaundementes, and to obeye theyr soueraygne Lorde and hyghe powers, and to exercyse Godlye charite, and to vse them selues, accordynge to theyr vocations: in a pure and syncere christen lyfe without murmure or grudgynges. By the which Iniunctiōs the Kynges royall maiestye intended, that his louynge subiectes shulde haue and vse the commoditie of the readyng of the sayde Bybles, for the purpose aboue rehersed, humbly, mekely, reuerently and obediently: and not that any of them shulde reade the sayde Bybles, wyth lowde and hyghe voyces, in tyme of the celebracion of the holye Masse and other dyuyne seruyces vsed in the churche, nor that any hys laye subiectes redynge the same, shulde presume to take vpon them, any commen dysputacyon, argumente or exposicyon of the mysteries therein conteyned, but that euery suche laye man shulde humbly, mekely and reuerently reade the same, for his owne instruction, edification, and amendement of hys lyfe, accordynge to goddes holy worde therin mencioned. And not withstandynge the Kynges sayde moost godlye and gracious commaundement and Iniunction in forme as is afore sayde. Hys royall maiestye is informed that diuers and many Townes and paryshes within thys hys realme haue negligently omytted theyr duetties in the accomplishement therof wherof his hyghnes marueyleth not a lytle. And myndynge the execucion of his sayde former, moost godly and gracyous Iniunctions doeth straytlye charge and commaunde that the Curates and paryshioners of euery towne and paryshe within thys hys realme of Englande, not hauynge already Bybles prouyded within theyr paryshe churches, shall on thys syde the feaste of Allsayntes next cōmynge, bye and prouyde Bybles of the largest and greatest volume, & cause the same to be set and fyxed in euery of the sayde paryshe churches, there to be vsed as is aforesayd: accordynge to the sayde former Iniunctions: vpon payne that the Curate and inhabitauntes of the paryshes and townes, shal lose and forfayte to the Kynges maiestye for euery moneth that they shall lacke and want the sayde Bybles, after the sayd feast of Allsayntes fourty shyllynges, the one halfe of the same forfayt to be to ꝑ kynges maiesty, & the other halfe to hym or the whyche shall fynde and present the same to the Kynges maiestyes counsayle. And fynally, the kynges royall maiestie doeth declare and synifye to all and synguler his louynge subiectes, that to thentent they maye haue the sayde Bybles of the greatest volume at equall and reasonable prices. His hyghnes by the aduyse of hys counsayle hath ordeyned and taxed: that the sellers therof, shall not take for any of the sayde Bybles vnbounde, aboue the price of ten shyllynges. And for euery of the sayde Bybles well and sufficientlye, bounde, trymmed and clasped, not aboue twelue shyllynges, vpon payne, the seller to lose for euerye Byble solde contrary to this his hyghnes proclamacion fourty shyllynges, the one moyte therof to the kynges maiestie: & the other moyte, to the fynder and presenter of the defaulte, as is afore sayde. And his hyghnes streyghtly chargeth & commaundeth that all and synguler ordinaries haynge ecclesiasticall iurysdiction within this his churche and realme of Englande and the dominion of Wales, that they & euery of them shall put theyr effectuall endeuours, that the Curates and parishioners shall obeye and accomplyshe, thys his maiestyes proclamacion and cōmaundement, as they tender the aduauncement of the kynges moost gracious and godly purpose in that behalfe, and as they wyll answere to his hyghnes for the same.

GOD SAVE THE KYNGE.

Excussum per Richardum Grafton & Edwardum Whitchurch.
Cum priuilegio ad imprimendum solum

Proclamation of Henry VIII. ordering the English Bible to be used in all churches

of Sallust's *Jugurthine War*. It cannot be said that he is a poet in any true sense of the word. His version of the *Narrenschiff* is not made from the original German, but from the Latin version of Locherus; he is entitled to credit for the skill which he has shown in breaking up the hexameters into English rhyme royal: if, as the German biographer of Brant confesses, the original was entirely devoid of poetry, Barclay was not the man to bring what he did not find. The following, from the speech of the book collector who passes for a learned man on the strength of his library, is a fair specimen of Barclay's manner:—

Cryght delectable
tyle vpon a goodly Gar
laureat Chapelet of Laurell vp mayster Skelton Poete
laureat ꝙuopouſly vpꝛyſed at Oxenforde Caſtell. In
ꝑ tozeſte of galtres/where in ar cõpꝛyſyng many ſ dyuers
ſolacyous ſ tyght pꝛegnant allectyues of ſyngular plea-
ſure/as more at large it doth apere in ꝑ ꝓces folowynge.

Title-page of Skelton's "Goodly Garlande"

That in this ship the chief place I govérn,
By this wide sea with foolés wandering
The cause is plain and easy to discern;
Still I am busy books assembling,
For to have plenty it is a pleasant thing,
In my conceyt, to have them ay in hand;
But what they mean do I not understand.

But yet I have them in great reverence
And honour, saving them from filth and ordure,
By often brushing and much diligence,
Full goodly bound in pleasant coverture
Of damas, satin, or else of velvet pure;
I keep them sure fearing they should be lost,
For in them is the cunning wherein I me boast.

But if it fortune that any learned man
Within my house fall to disputation,
I drawe the curtaynes to show my bookés then,
That they of my cunning should make probation:
I kepé not to fall in altercation;
And while they commune, my books I turn and wind,
For all's in them and nothing in my mind.

Barclay is by no means a servile translator. Nothing is said in his original of damask, satin, or velvet bindings: probably because German books were commonly bound in leather. His *Eclogues*, following Mantuan, were absurdly entitled by him *Eglogues*, under the impression that this meant the talk of goatherds, although, as Johnson remarks, it could only mean the talk of goats. Two of the five are imitated from Mantuan, the others are chiefly made up from passages in the *Miseriae Curialium* of Aeneas Sylvius. There is but little of rural nature in these professed bucolics: but there is some human nature in the contrasted characters of the townsman and the country shepherd, and the notices of Bishop Alcock and other contemporaries are not devoid of interest. But the stuff of the poet's mind is

prose, and the medium of its expression at best "a scrannel pipe of wretched straw."

While English bards of the old stamp were thus prosing rather than poetising, the poetical regeneration of English literature was approaching from a quarter from which it had already come once before. The impulse which Italy had communicated to Chaucer, now almost extinct, was about to be renewed. Athough the fifteenth century had in Italy, as elsewhere, been a period almost barren as regarded direct poetical production, the taste for poetry had never died out. Dante and Petrarch retained their fame and their readers, and after the discovery of printing their works were among the first to issue from the press. In the last quarter of the century the capacity for original composition revived in the persons of Lorenzo de' Medici, Politian, Boiardo, Pulci, and Sannazaro, with a swarm of minor writers and many elegant Latin poets. England was long in following the example, but intercourse with Italy had been greatly increased by extended commerce and facilities for foreign travel, and it was impossible that refined and poetically sensitive minds in England should remain uninfluenced, or that, becoming sensible as they must of the inferiority of their own country, they should not endeavour to remedy this in the only way possible to men devoid of creative genius, by imitation. The regeneration of English poetry under Henry VIII. is therefore not associated with any reformer or restorer of striking genius, but with two men more conspicuous for the work they accomplished than for the absolute merit of their productions, and who in the next age would have taken but a subordinate place as poets. As became the initiators of a reform to be achieved in the name of culture, both were among the most accomplished men of their age and country, scholars, soldiers, and statesmen. They were the elder Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey. The less poetically gifted of the two enjoyed the advantage of coming first.

From Alexander Barclay's "Ship of Fools," 1509

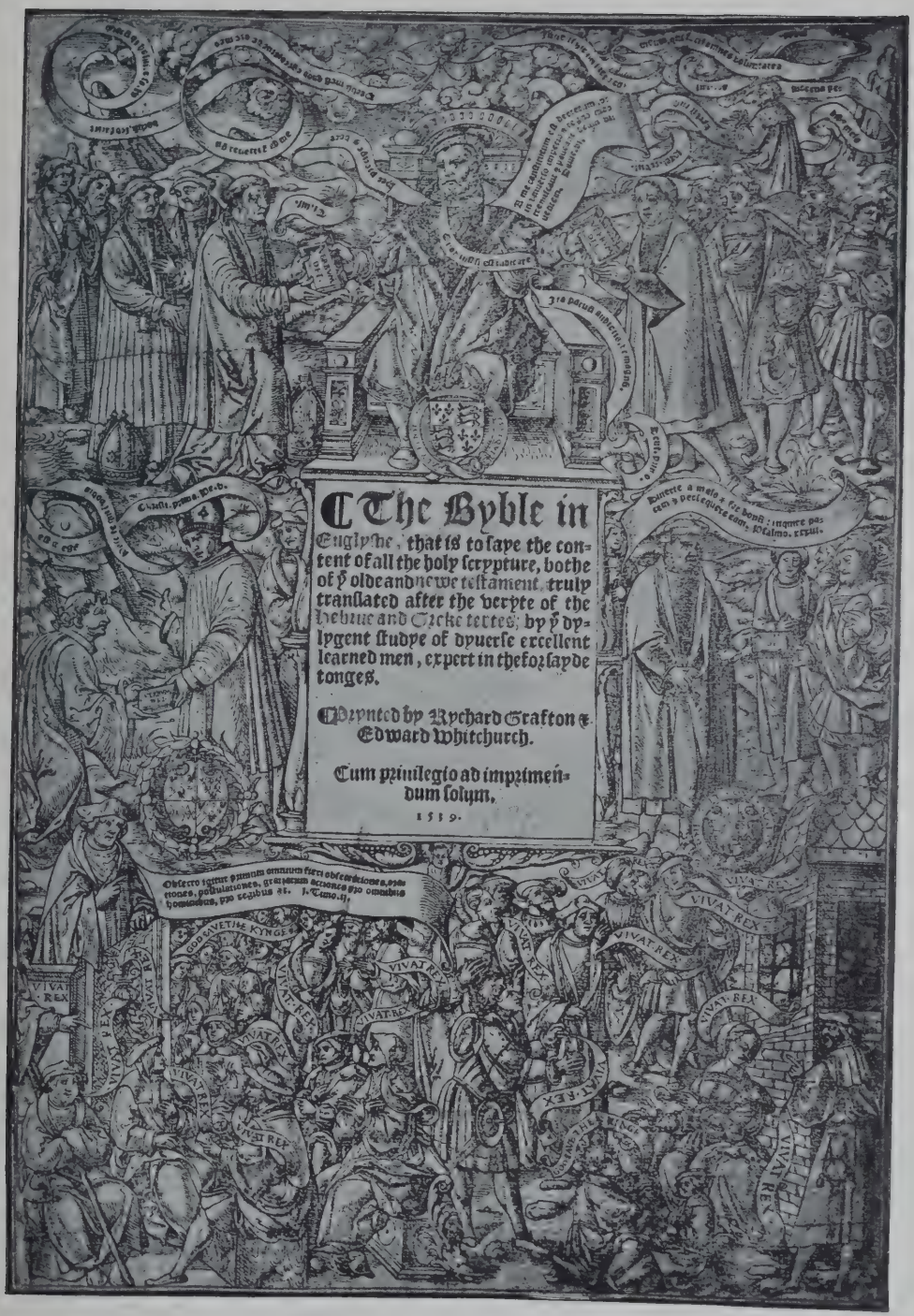
Sir Thomas Wyatt—(1503?–1542)—not to be confounded with his equally celebrated son who was beheaded under Queen Mary, was born at Allington Castle Kent, about 1503, and was the son of Sir Henry Wyatt, a privy councillor of Henry VII

and Henry VIII., and high in favour with both. Thomas Wyatt travelled in Italy in 1526 and 1527, the period when Renaissance culture attained its highest culmination in that country, but also when it received a deadly blow from the sack of Rome. Returning to England, he became, as commonly believed, unduly intimate with Anne Boleyn, and is said to have warned the King against espousing her. According to another report, however, he encouraged the divorce by the remark that it was strange that the King should not be able to put away his sin without leave of the Pope. Other pithy speeches, tersely expressing the essence of the particular question at issue, are attributed to him. Either on this account or for the service he had striven to render to Henry, or for his general merits and abilities, he was, with two brief intervals of apparent disgrace and confinement in the Tower, in continual favour, and was employed in important foreign missions. He died at Sherborne in October 1542, of a fever contracted by fatigue in hastening to escort the Spanish Ambassador in his progress from Falmouth to London.

Sir Thomas Wyatt
From an engraving by Bartolozzi after Holbein

It is a capital distinction of Wyatt's to have been not merely the first English poet who consciously aspired to a high degree of refinement, but the first patrician who made an auspicious mark in English poetry. Chaucer and Gower certainly wanted nothing of the essential character of gentlemen, and were acceptable and even familiar at court; but the station of one of them was that of an official, and the other probably that of a retired merchant. Other poets had for the most part been either priests or men of inferior standing. Wyatt first united blood and breeding, and filled the place which the aristocratic patrons of literature in the preceding century, the Tiptofts and Riverses, would have filled if they had been poets. As a man he was of the class for whom Castiglione and Bembo had written; as a poet it was his to show that love rules "the court" and "the camp" no less than "the grove."

The feature of his work which gives him his chief importance in the history of English poetical literature, is not the one which procures him his chief distinction as a poet. It is his introduction of the sonnet into English poetry. By this he not merely enriched his native country with a beautiful form, but, by prescribing a higher standard of art than had hitherto prevailed, he indirectly raised the standard of all poetical composition. His sonnets, nevertheless, whether translated or original, are the least satisfactory part of his writings. The English language was not yet sufficiently refined to allow


The Byble in
Englyshe, that is to saye the
content of all the holy scrypture, bothe
of ỹ olde and newe testament, truly
translated after the verpte of the
Hebrue and Dacke textes, by ỹ dy-
lygent studye of dyuerse excellent
learned men, expert in the forsayde
tonges.
Prynted by Rychard Grafton &
Edward Whitchurch.
Cum priuilegio ad imprimen-
dum solum.
1539.
VIVAT REX
GOD SAUE THE KYNGE

Title-page of the Great Bible, 1539

the perfect form of the Italian sonnet to be reproduced with exactness, nor did Wyatt hit upon the modification of it which was to prove so effective in the hands of Shakespeare. The Italian form is spoiled, and no passable substitute is evolved, nor does the intrinsic value of the thought make amends for the unskilfulness of the elaboration. The true poet is revealed, not in these ambitious attempts, but in the simple love-lyric. Even here, Wyatt often appears too conventionally lachrymose for genuine charm, but he often utters such simple bird-like notes as England had hardly heard before, and seems to prefigure the strains of a Waller or a Herrick. The following verses, for example, part of a longer poem, ring with the music which nothing but true poetic feeling can create :—

SONGES AND SONETTES, written by the right honorable Lorde Henry Haward late Earle of Surrey, and other.

As cruel waves full oft be found
Against the rocks to roar and cry,
So doth my heart full oft rebound
Against my breast full bitterly.

And as the spider draws her line,
With labour lost I frame my suit ;
The fault is hers, the loss is mine ;
Of ill-sown seed such is the fruit.

I fall and see mine own decay,
As he that bears flame in his breast,
Forgets for pain to cut away
The thing that breedeth his unrest.

Apud Ricardum Tottel. Cum priuilegio ad imprimendum solum. 1557.

Title-page of Tottel's "Miscellany"

Or this :—

Blame not my lute, for he must sound
Of this or that as liketh me ;
For lack of wit the lute is bound
To give such tune as pleaseth me ;
Though my songs be somewhat strange,
And speak such words as touch thy change,
Blame not my lute.

As already mentioned, tradition asserts Wyatt to have been the lover of Anne Boleyn, and supposes his amorous poetry to have been addressed to her. In one of his sonnets he certainly seems to say that the object of his adoration is out of his reach as belonging to the King, and compares her to the hind dismissed by Cæsar with an engraven collar attesting his ownership. But the thought is taken, almost translated, from Petrarch (Sonnet 160, Carducci's edition), and the piece can hardly be regarded as more than a *jeu d'esprit*. If Anne was not the object of his devotion we have no other clue. If the following adaptation of Horace's *Ode to Lyce*, greatly beautified in the process, was actually addressed to any person, this could not be Anne Boleyn :—

My lute, awake ! perform the last
Labour that thou and I shall waste,
And end that I have now begun ;
For when this song is sung and past,
My lute, be still, for I have done.

As to be heard where ear is none,
As lead to grave in marble stone,
My song may pierce her heart as soon :
Should we then sing, or sigh, or moan?
No, no, my lute ! for I have done.

The rock doth not so cruelly
Repulse the waves continually,
As she my suit and affection ;
So that I am past remedy,
Whereby my lute and I have done.

Proud of the spoil that thou hast got
Of simple heart, thorough Love's shot,
By whom, unkind, thou hast them won,
Think not he hath his bow forgot,
Although my lute and I have done.

Vengeance shall fall on thy disdain,
Thou mak'st but game of earnest pain :
Trow not alone under the sun
Unquit to cause thy lover's pain,
Although my lute and I have done.

May chance thee lie withered and old
The winter nights that are so cold,
Paining in vain unto the moon :
Thy wishes then dare not be told :
Care then who list, for I have done.

And then may chance thee to repent
The time that thou hast lost and spent,
To cause thy lovers' sigh and swoon :
Then shalt thou know beauty but lent,
And wish and want as I have done.

Now cease, my lute ! this is the last
Labour that thou and I shall waste,
And ended is that I begun ;
Now is this song both sung and past ;
My lute ! be still, for I have done.

Wyatt's enrichment of English poetry by the introduction of the sonnet was not his only service of this kind. He performed the more difficult feat of naturalising the terza rima, which previously only appears in one fragment by Chaucer, so far as this uncongenial form admits of naturalisation to English. For some reason, difficult to explain, the terza rima, which in Italian pursues an easy course like a rippling stream, with just sufficient interruption for variety, in English moves awkwardly and tardily, unless when, as in Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*, it is converted into

a lyrical metre by division into separate stanzas. Even Byron's *Prophecy of Dante* wears the air of an exotic, while his octaves, although equally an imported form, appears native to our tongue. Wyatt, who has employed this form in a paraphrase of the *Penitential Psalms* and in satires, imitated from Alamanni, has done better than almost any successor. A passage like this, gliding along with easy fluency of the Italian, suggests that, notwithstanding all obstacles, the form of Dante's invention may one day be acclimatised in England :

Katharine of Arragon

After the portrait in the National Portrait Gallery

My mother's maids, when they did sew and spin,
They sang sometimes a song of the field mouse ;
That, for because her livelode was but thin,
Would needs go seek her townish sister's house.
She thought herself enduréd[1] to much pain ;
The stormy blasts her cave so sore did souse,
That when the furrows swimméd with the rain
She must lie cold and wet, in sorry plight ;
And, worse than that, bare meat there did remain
To comfort her, when she her house had dight ;
Sometimes a barley corn, sometimes a bean,
For which she laboured hard both day and night
In harvest time, whilst she might go and glean :
And when her store was 'stroyéd with the flood,
Then well away ! for she undone was clean.

The romantic history of Wyatt's coadjutor in the revival of English poetry is too well known to require much detail in this place. Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, was born about 1517, and fell a victim to the jealousy, or rather perhaps the exasperated temper, of Henry VIII. in 1547. He was esteemed the mirror of knighthood by his contemporaries, and seems to have in all respects deserved the character but for the occasional outbreaks of an overweening pride which sometimes involved him in undignified predicaments, and unhappily concurred with a political crisis to awake the suspicion of a mistrustful sovereign. If, as there is reason to believe, Surrey inclined to the principles of the Reformation, he must have played a great part in the subsequent history of England. The internal evidence to his character from his poems is most favourable, he appears everywhere as a man of the most refined intellect, and the noblest aspirations.

[1] Hardened.

In power of mind Surrey and Wyatt appear much upon a par, nor can either be said to have been a more genuine poet than the other as respects either the force or the quality of his inspiration. Surrey's superiority consists in the superiority of his art. He has more ease of expression than Wyatt, and handles rhythm and language with more grace. Though unable to reproduce the Italian sonnet in English he avoided Wyatt's clumsiness by devising a new sonnet form entirely suitable to the genius of our language, and destined, when Shakespeare took it up, to become the vehicle of some of our finest poetry. That Shakespeare himself had a worthy precursor in Surrey may appear from the following dignified composition, exalted by the closing couplet into real nobleness, on the death of his faithful retainer John Clere :—

Anne Boleyn

After the portrait in the National Portrait Gallery

Norfolké sprung thee, Lambeth holds thee dead,
Clere of the County of de Cleremont hight :
Within the womb of Ormond's race thou'rt bred,
And saw'st thy cousin[1] crowned in thy sight.
Shelton for love, Surrey for lord thou chase :
(Ay me ! while life did last that league was tender)
Tracing whose steps thou sawest Kelsal blaze,
Landrecy burnt and battered Boulogne re ider,
At Montreuil gates, hopeless of all recure,[2]
Thine Earl, half dead, gave in thine hand his will ;
Which cause did thee this pining death procure,
Ere summers four times seven thou could'st fulfil.
Ah, Clere, if love had booted, care, or cost,
Heaven had not won, nor earth so timely lost.

Surrey's muse also rises to much dignity in the poem written during his confinement at Windsor Castle, the place of his education, where, contrasting his former playground with his present prison, he enumerates the delights he had been wont to enjoy with something of the feeling of a former collegian for his college, or a schoolboy for his school :—

Where each sweet place returns a taste full sour,
The large green courts where we were wont to rove
With eyes cast up into the Maiden's tower,
And easy sighs, such as folk draw in love :

[1] Anne Boleyn. [2] Recovery.

The statety seats, the ladies bright of hue,
The dances short, long tales of great delight ;
With words and looks that tigers could but rue,
Where each of us did plead the other's right :

The palm-play[1] where despoiléd for the game,
With dazed eyes oft we by gleams of love,
Have missed the ball and got sight of our dame,
To bait her eyes which kept the leads above .

Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey
After the portrait in the National Portrait Gallery

The gravelled ground, with sleeves tied on the helm,
On foaming horse with swords and friendly hearts,
With chere[2] as though one should another whelm,
Where we have fought, and chaséd oft with darts :

With silver drops the meads yet spread for ruth,
In active games of nimbleness and strength
Where we did strain, trainéd with swarms of youth
Our tender limbs, that yet shot up in length :

The secret groves, which oft we made resound
Of pleasant plaint, and of our ladies' praise
Recording soft what grace each one had found,
What hope of speed, what dread of long delays :

The wild forést, the clothéd holts with green,
With reins availed,[3] and swifty-breathéd horse,
With cry of hounds, and merry blasts between,
Where we did chase the fearful hart of force :

The void walls eke that harboured us each night,
Wherewith, alas ! revive within my breast
The sweet accord, such sleeps as yet delight ;
The pleasant dreams, the quiet bed of rest .

The secret thoughts imparted with such trust :
The wanton talk, the divers change of play ;
The friendship sworn, each promise kept so just,
Wherewith we past the winter nights away.

Surrey's supposed attachment to the Fair Geraldine (Fitzgerald), and his vision of her in Cornelius Agrippa's wondrous glass, as related by Thomas Nash, have supplied Scott with the subject of a fine poem ; and it is true that one of his own poems records his attachment to a Geraldine, but the supposed

[1] Tennis. [2] Aspect. [3] Drooped.

object of his affections was then a child, and there is no ground for deeming him other than a constant husband to the lady whom he had wedded in early youth. So Platonic is his love poetry, that one of its most impassioned examples is composed in the character of a forlorn woman :—

O happy dames, that may embrace
  The fruit of your delight,
Help to bewail the woful case
  And eke the heavy plight
Of me, that wonted to rejoice
The fortune of my pleasant choice :
Good ladies, help to fill my mourning voice.

In ship, freight with rememberance
  Of thoughts and pleasures past,
He sails that hath in governance
  My life while it will last :
With scalding sighs, for lack of gale,
Furthering his hope, that is his sail,
Toward me, the sweet port of his avail.

Alas ! how oft in dreams I see
  Those eyes that were my food ;
Which sometime so delighted me
  That yet they do me good ;
Wherewith I wake with his return
Whose absent flame did make me burn :
But when I find the lack, Lord ! how I mourn !

When other lovers in arms across
  Rejoice their chief delight,
Drowned in tears, to mourn my loss
  I stand the bitter night
In my window where I may see
Before the winds how the clouds flee :
Lo ! what a mariner love hath made me !

And in green waves when the salt flood
  Doth rise by rage of wind,
A thousand fancies in that mood
  Assail my restless mind.
Alas ! now drowneth my sweet foe,
That with the spoil of my heart did go,
And left me ; but alas ! why did he so ?

And when the seas wax calm again
  To chase fro me annoy,
My doubtful hope doth cause me pain,
  So dread cuts off my joy.
Thus is my wealth mingled with woe,
And of each thought a doubt doth grow ;
—Now he comes. Will he come ? Alas ! no, no.

English poetry has evidently entered a new region with Wyatt and Surrey. It is not so much the intrinsic merit of their productions which renders them memorable, as their having produced something which, unlike almost everything that preceded it, cannot even now be termed superannuated. The

beauty of Surrey's form remains, even when thought and diction appear antiquated. Like Wyatt, he excels in *terza rima*. We have not yet mentioned his greatest service to English poetry, the introduction of blank verse. Alliterative metre had indeed been free from the trammels of rhyme, but had trammels of its own even more restrictive, and was entirely incapable of that artful modulation by which, in the hands of a really tuneful poet, blank verse compensates for the absence of rhyme. No language in the world is so well adapted for blank verse as the English, and its introduction was to have results which no one at the time could have foreseen. Surrey, a sweet and graceful lyric poet, can have been actuated by nothing of the pedantry of Roger Ascham: his motive must have been simply the greater facility of blank verse in translation, to which his examples of it are confined; and it was long before his example was followed, or extended to any other form of poetry but the dramatic. Surrey's versions comprised the second and fourth books of the *Æneid*. Their merit will appear the more remarkable when it is considered that he wrought without a model. This is his version of the exordium of the second *Æneid*:—

King James IV.
From "Inscriptiones Historicæ Regum Scotorum," 1602

> They whisted all, with fixèd face attent,
> When Prince Aeneas from the royal seat
> Thus gan to speak: O Queen, it is thy will
> I should renew a woe cannot be told:
> How that the Greeks did spoil and overthrow
> The Phrygian wealth, and wailful realm of Troy.
> Those ruthful things that I myself beheld,
> And w.ereof no small part fell to my share,
> Which to express who could refrain from tears?
> What Myrmidon? or yet what Dolopes?
> What stern Ulysses' wagéd soldier?
> And lo! moist night now from the welkin falls,
> And stars declining counsel us to rest.
> But since so great is thy delight to hear
> Of our mishaps, and Troyé's last decay,
> Though to record the same my soul abhors,
> And plaint eschews, yet thus will I begin.

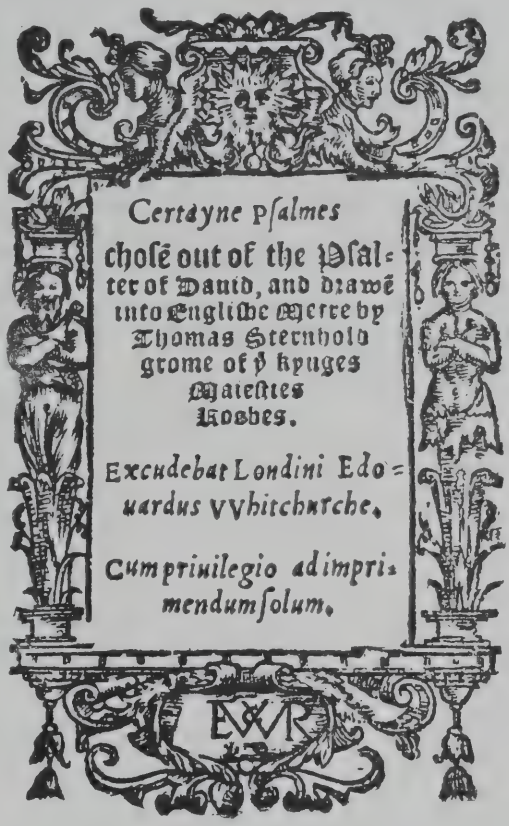
It is not in general easy to determine whether the ballads and fugitive

lyrics of the sixteenth century belong to the first or the second half of it, and it will be best to defer the consideration of them until the period of Elizabeth. One of them, however, *The King's Ballad*, must be cited here as most probably the production of Henry VIII. himself, who undoubtedly was a composer both of songs and music :—

Pastime with good company
I love and shall until I die ;
Grudge who list but none deny,
So God be pleased thus live will I.
For my pastance,
Hunt, song, and dance
My heart is set :
All goodly sport
For my comfort,
Who shall me let ?

Youth must have some dalliance,
Of good or illé some pastance ;
Company methinks then best
All thoughts and fancies to dejest :
For idleness
Is chief mistress
Of vices all :
Then who can say
But mirth and play
Is best of all ?

Company with honesty
Is virtue vices to flee :
Company is good and ill,
But every man hath his free will.
The best ensue,
The worst eschew,
My mind shall be :
Virtue to use,
Vice to refuse,
Shall I use me.

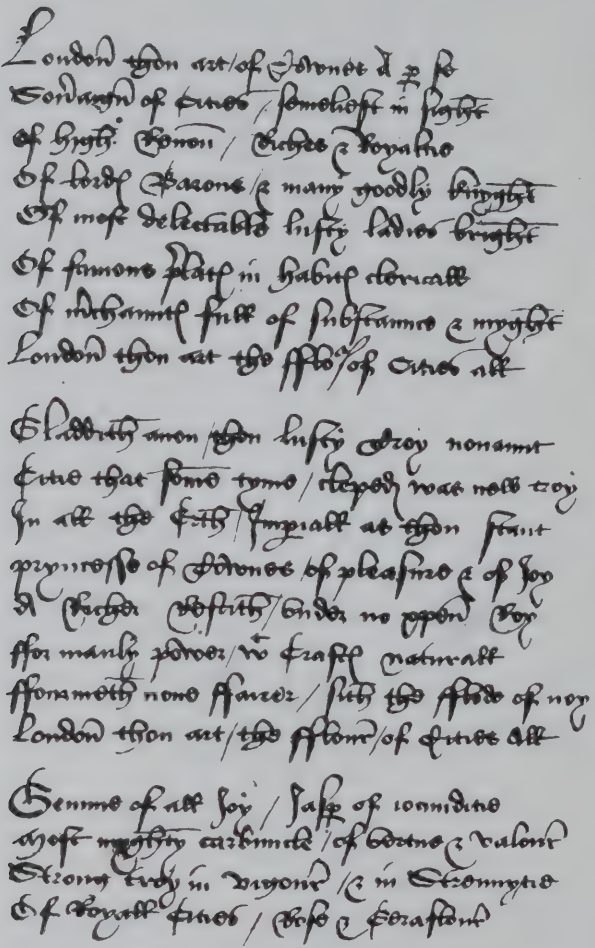


Title-page of Sternhold's "Certayne Psalmes," 1548

The metrical version of the Psalms by THOMAS STERNHOLD and JOHN HOPKINS must not be omitted, though none of the renderings possess any poetical merit except "The Old Hundredth." Forty versions are ascribed to Sternhold, sixty to Hopkins, and the remainder to various authors. The first edition, containing only nineteen psalms, probably appeared about 1547, the first complete edition was published in 1562. It was a work of necessity rather than of mercy, and it is surprising that its imperfections should have been so meekly tolerated by an age which possessed the noble prose translations in the Prayer-book and Bible.

The age of Henry the Eighth was not destitute of attempts in the drama, which may be classified as either survivals of the old miracle play, or rude precursors of the modern stage, along with which they will be most advantageously considered.

We must now resume the consideration of poetry in Scotland, a brilliant period preluding a complete eclipse. The most remarkable Scotch poet of the early Tudor age, and indeed of all early Scotch poetry, is **William Dunbar**—(1460?–1520?) a man uniting refined fancy with coarse humour and vivid realism, a great master both of flowery and of vituperative rhetoric, an excellent painter both of Nature and of mankind, and consummate in versification. Of his life little is known, but that little is interesting. In his youth he had the experience, almost unique among poets, of having travelled over Scotland and part of the Continent in the character of a begging Franciscan friar. He afterwards took regular orders, and became poet laureate to James IV., who pensioned him, but turned a deaf ear to his supplications for a benefice.



Poem by Dunbar in praise of London

British Museum MS. Vitell. A xvi

I know not how the Kirk is guided,
But benefices are not leill[1] divided;
Some men has seven, and I not ane.
Quhilk to consider is ane pain.

And some, unworthy to brook one stall,
Would climb to be a Cardinall;
One bishopric may not him gane[2]
Quhilk to consider is ane pain.

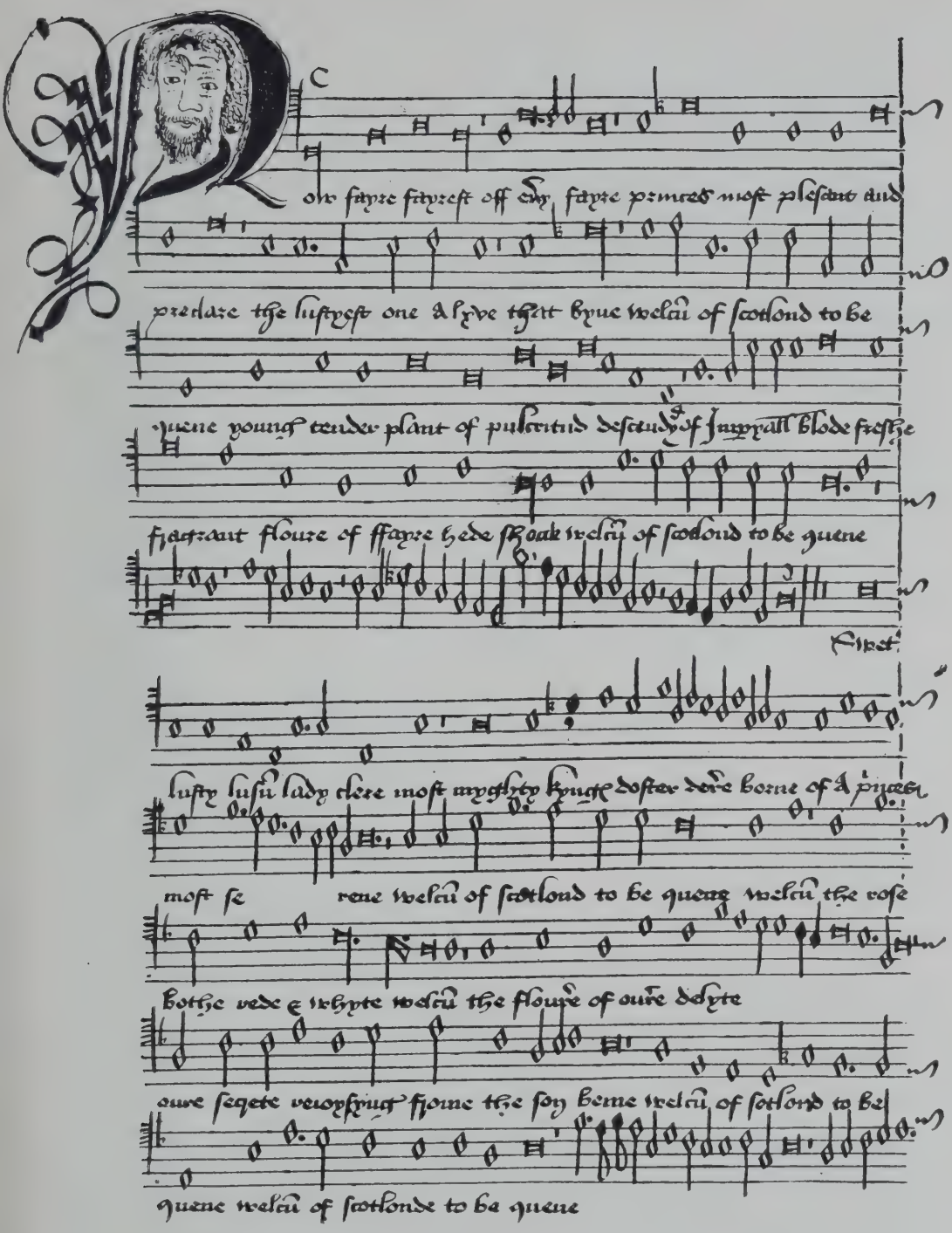
Unworthy I, among the lave,
One Kirk do crave, and none can have,
Some with ane thrauf[3] plays passage plain.[4]
Quhilk to consider is ane pain.

It comes by King, it comes by Queen,
But aye such space is us between,
That none can shoot it with a flane.[5]
Quhilk to consider is ane pain.

It might have come in shorter while
Frae Calicut and the new found isle
By parts of Transmeridiane.
Quhilk to consider is ane pain.

Dunbar probably wrote poetry before 1500, when he first received a pension. He seems to have accompanied the mission despatched to London in 1503 to negotiate for the hand of Margaret Tudor, when he must have composed his panegyric on London, gratifying to the pride of its citizens, but plainly written to order. The chief period of

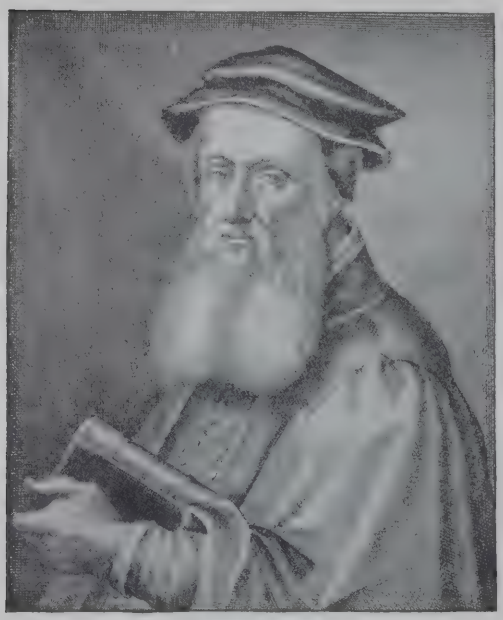
[1] Fairly. [2] Suffice. [3] Heap. [4] An old game played with dice. [5] Arrow.


C
our fayre fayrest off our fayre primrose most plesant and
preclare the lustyest one alyve tyll hyme welcu of scotlond to be
quene young tender plant of puleritud descendyd of Imperall blode freshe
fragrant floure of ffayre hede Roak welcu of scotlond to be quene
lusty lusu lady clere most mygthy kynge doster dere borne of A princes
most se rene welcu of scotlond to be quene welcu the rose
bothe rede & whyte welcu the floure of our delyte
our secrete recoverynge ffoime the joy borne welcu of scotlond to be
quene welcu of scotlonde to be quene

Dunbar's Song of Welcome to Margaret Tudor as Queen of Scotland

British Museum Appendix to Royal MSS. 58

his poetical activity seems to have been between this date and the fatal battle of Flodden in 1513, after which he is not mentioned. One poem bearing his name refers to a transaction in 1517, and he probably died soon afterwards. If the poem referred to be not genuine, he may have fallen at Flodden. The agitations of the Reformation period submerged him along with the other early Scotch poets; and although some of his poems were printed in his lifetime, only one copy of the edition has come down to us. In 1832 his works were collected by David Laing, and he has since held his place with little controversy at the head of ancient Scotch poetry, a personification of the national character on the side of its vigour and its humour, the latter frequently involving gross indelicacy. In another point of view he is a continuer of James I. and Henryson, whose poetry is grounded upon Chaucer's. He speaks of Chaucer with enthusiasm:



Bishop Bale

From Holland's "Heroologia," 1620

> O reverend Chaucer, rose of rhetors all,
> Surmounting every tongue terrestriall,
> Far as May's morn doth midnight:

and with less discrimination, extols the "sugared lips and tongués aureate," and "angel mouthés most mellifluate" of Lydgate and Gower.

The most Chaucerian of Dunbar's poems is *The Golden Targe*, an allegory of the type so favoured by Chaucer and his successors, composed in a peculiarly beautiful nine-line stanza, which modern poets might reproduce with advantage. The poet goes forth upon a May morning, brilliantly described:—

> For mirth of May, with skippis and with hoppis,
> The birdis sang upon the tender croppis,
> With curious note, as Venus chapel clerks:
> The roses young, new spreading of their knoppis,[1]
> Were poudered bright with heavenly beryl droppis,
> Through beamés red, burning as ruby sparks,
> The skyés rang for shouting of the larks
> The purple heaven o'er scaled in silver sloppis,[2]
> O'er gilt the treïs; branches, leaves and barks.

After a while he lies down and dreams, and sees in a vision Beauty landing from a shallop accompanied by a troop of ladies, mostly allegorical personages, who make him, vainly defended by Reason, their prisoner, and deliver him into the custody of Heavy Cheer. It has been suggested that the poem was designed as the groundwork of a court masque, and this may have been the case, though there is no reason why it might not have been a mere sport of

[1] Buds. [2] Slopes.

phantasy. *The Thistle and the Rose*, however, is clearly a court poem, composed to celebrate the marriage of James IV. with Margaret Tudor in 1504. It is another vision, this time in rhyme royal. Nature summons all animals and plants around her to witness the coronation of the Thistle (Scotland) and the Rose (England) as King and Queen of the vegetable creation, with a side rebuke to the Lily (France). Like the *Targe*, it is thoroughly Chaucerian in spirit, and very charming. Warton is nevertheless justified in his remark that "for all his ornate fancy the natural character of Dunbar's genius is of the moral and didactic cast." This is evinced in the homely and familiar pieces, broadly humorous as these often are, which constitute the staple of his poetry, as well as in his more directly moralising poems. The best known of these is the *Lament of the Makers, i.e.*, the poets whom he has known and admired, but who, from Chaucer to his friend Kennedy, have become the prey of Death. There is something almost Villon-like in this dismal catalogue and its continual refrain, *Timor Mortis conturbat me.* Here the didactic purpose is reconciled with poetry by energy of expression, elsewhere the alliance is effected by profuse fancy or boisterous humour. The former is exemplified by the contest between divine and earthly love in the very beautiful poem of *The Merle and the Nightingale*:—

Edward VI.

From Holland's "Heroologia," 1620

Bishop Bale before Edward VI.

In May as that Aurora did upspring
With cristall e'en charming the cluddis sable,

I heard a merle with merry notis sing
A song of love, with voice right comfortable,
Against the orient beamés amiable
Upon a blissful branch of laurel green;
This was her sentence sweet and delectable,
A lusty life in lové's service bene,[1]

Under this branch ran down a river bright
Of balmy liquor, crystalline of hue,
Against the heavenly azure skyis light,
Where did, upon the other side, pursue
A nightingale, with sugared notis new,
Whose angel feathers as the peacock shone;
This was her song, and of a sentence true,
All love is lost but upon God alone.

With notis glad and glorious harmony
This joyful merle so salued she the day,
While rung the wo des of her melody,
Saying, Awake, ye lovers, O, this May.
Lo, freshé Flora has flourished every spray,
As nature has her taught, the noble queen,
The field been clothed in a new array:
A lusty life in lové's service bene.

Ne'er sweeter noise was heard with living man
Than made this merry gentle nightingale,
Her sound went with the river as it ran,
Out through the fresh and flourished lusty vale.
"O merle," quoth she, "O fool, stint of thy tale,
For in thy song good sentence is there none,
For both is tynt the time and the travail
Of every love but upon God alone."

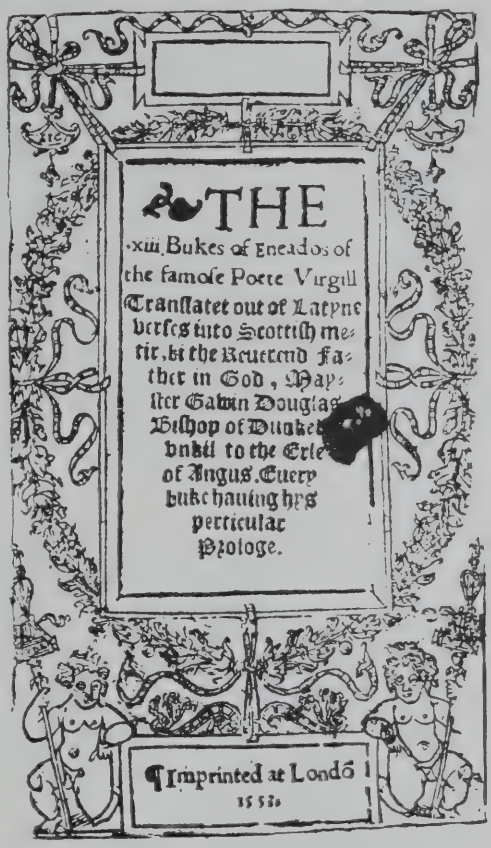
The blackbird and nightingale continue their melodious controversy, always with the same refrain, until it suits the poet to put an end to it, which he can only do by awarding victory to the nightingale. It will have been observed, however, that his taste for earthly splendour is such that he has dressed his nightingale like a peacock. Other moral pieces are rendered poetical by extravagance of invention, as *The Devil's Inquest*, *Kynd Kittock* and *The Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins*, who exhibit themselves before the Devil with their proper attributes, but are quite outdone by the Highlanders whom Satan summons to wind up the festivity :—

These termagents, with tag and tatter,
Full loud in Erse began to clatter,
And roup[2] like raven and rook
The Devil so deaved was with their yell,
That in the deepest pit of hell
He smorit them with smoke.

Though not a man of marked original faculty like Dunbar, **Gavin Douglas**, Bishop of Dunkeld (1474?–1522?) is a true poet. His original poems, *The Palace of Honour*, and *King Hart*, allegories in the style of Lydgate, though not devoid of

[1] Is. [2] Cry; German, *rufen*.

interest, are still somewhat heavy. He has, nevertheless, gained high reputation as the translator of Virgil's *Æneid*, not so much for the merit of the version as such, as for the boldness of the undertaking in his day, his priority over other translators, his happy choice of the heroic metre, and especially for the prologues of his own composition prefixed to the various books, in some of which he appears to great advantage as a descriptive poet. A younger son of the great Archibald, Earl Douglas, and provost of St. Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh, his fortunes seemed greatly exalted by the marriage, within a year after the fatal defeat of Flodden in which James IV. had perished, of the widowed Queen Margaret to the Earl of Angus, Douglas's own nephew. But the Queen's endeavours to advance him involved him in incessant broils, and after obtaining the bishopric of Dunkeld, he was obliged to take refuge in England, where he died of the plague in 1522.


THE
xiii. Bukes of Eneados of
the famose Poete Virgill
Translatet out of Latyne
verses into Scottish me-
tir, be the Reuerend Fa-
ther in God, Mayster Gawin Douglas
Bischop of Dunkel
bukll to the Erle
of Angus. Euery
buke hauing hys
perticular
Prologe.
Imprinted at Londō
1553.

Title-page of Gavin Douglas' translation of Virgil, 1553

Douglas professes great indignation at Caxton's version of Virgil from a French romance :—

> In prose he prent ane buik of Inglis gros,
> Clepand it Virgill in Eneados.
> Quhilk that he says of French he did translate,
> It hes nothing ado therewith, God wait,[1]
> Na mair like than the devill and Sanct Austyne:
> Have he na thank therfor, but lost his pyne.[2]

Douglas's own translation, though often prosaic, is sometimes truly poetical. His power, however, is chiefly evinced in the Prologues, especially when these are descriptive. Scotch poets seem particularly at home in describing

> The grandeur and the bloom,
> And all the mighty ravishment of Spring :

—probably from the suddenness of her advent in Northern latitudes, and the magical rapidity of the transformation she effects. The following passage is from the prologue to the twelfth book. The wintry landscape is depicted with equal force in the prologue to the seventh.

> Forth of his palace royal issued Phoebus,
> With golden crown and visage glorious.

[1] Wot. [2] Pain.

Crisp hairis, bright as chrysolite or topas,
For whose hue mightë none behold his face
The fiery sparkés bursting from his e'en
To purge the air and gild the tender green
The aureate phanes[1] of his head sovrane
With glitter and glance o'er spread the oceane.
The largé fluids, lemand[2] all with licht,
But with one blenk of his supernal sicht
For to behold it was a glore to see
The stablished windés and the calme sea,
The soft season, the firmament serene,
The loune illuminate air, the firth amene,
The silver scaléd fishes on the grete[3]
Athwart clear streams sprinkill and[4] for the heat,
With finnés showing brown as cinnabar,
And chiselled talys, steering here and there.

The description is pursued through a great number of lines, all embodying some detail both picturesque and true to nature. It concludes with an address to the sun :—

Welcome the lord of light and lamp of day !
Welcome fosterer of tender herbés green ;
Welcome quikkener of flourist flowers' shene ;
Welcome support of every root and vein ;
Welcome comfort of all kind fruit and grain ;
Welcome the birdis bield upon the brere ;
Welcome maister and ruler of the year ;
Welcome welfare of husbands at the plewis ;
Welcome, repairer of woods, trees, and bewis ;
Welcome, depainter of the bloomy meads ;
Welcome the life of everything that spreeds ;
Welcome restorer of all kind bestial,
Welcome be thy bright beamés gladding all.

Some irregularities in metre and grammar may perhaps be accounted for by the work not having received the author's final corrections. He died, as we have seen, prematurely, and it was not printed until 1553.

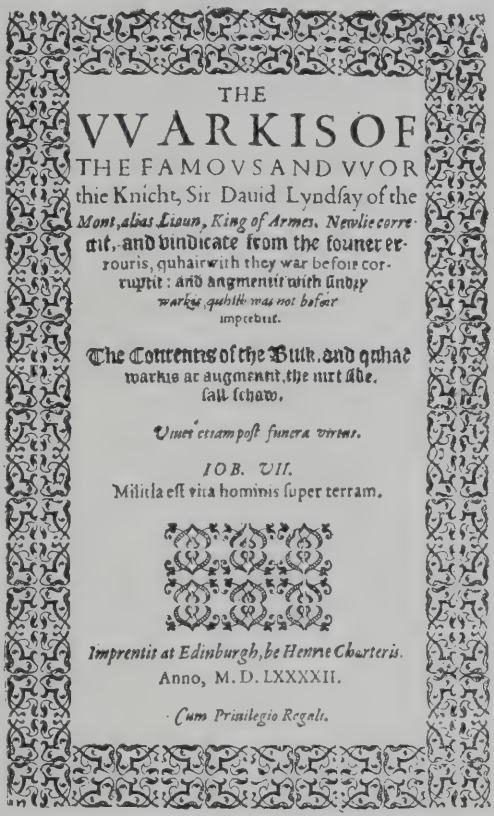
Sir David Lyndsay (1490-1555) has been accurately described as the poet of the Scotch Reformation as Dunbar was of the Scotch Renaissance. The description suggests that he may have been too unequivocally the man of his own time to be much in the hands of posterity, and such is the fact. During his lifetime he wielded great influence, and occupied the rare and honourable position of a courtier who makes it his business to tell the truth to his master and expose with unsparing hand the vices of all orders in the State. He had sufficient literary power to gain the attention of his contemporaries, but not sufficient to preserve his writings after the immediate occasion for them had gone by. He is, nevertheless, too useful to the historian, both of politics and of opinion, to be overlooked, and his most important work, *Ane Pleasant Satyre of the Three Estaites* (1540) is a highly interesting specimen of the early strivings after dramatic composition, with which it will fall to be

[1] Vans, wings. [2] Gleaming. [3] Gravel, *grit*. [4] Darting.

considered. His work next in importance, *The Dreme* (1529), is a long and somewhat tiresome allegory, but is dedicated to James V., in whose bringing up Lyndsay had taken part, and who rewarded him with continual favour and the office of Lyon King-at-Arms, in a prologue reminding his royal charge of their connexion in lines of genuine feeling and simplicity. The following are the first two stanzas :—

When thou wast young, I bore thee in my arm
Full tenderly, ti l thou began to gang ;
And in thy bed oft happit thee full warm,
With lute in hand syne sweetly to thee sang ;
Some time in dancing feiralie[1] I flang ;
And sometime playing farsis on the flure ;
And sometime on my office taking cure :

And some time like a fiend transfigurate,
And some time like the grisly ghost of Gye,
In divers forms at times disfigurate,
And some time dissagyist[2] full pleasantly.
So since thy birth I have continually
Been occupied, and aye to thy pleasoure ;
And some time Sewer,[3] Coppar, and Carvoure.


THE
VVARKIS OF
THE FAMOVS AND VVOR
thie Knicht, Sir Dauid Lyndſay of the
Mont, alias Lioun, King of Armes. Newlie correct, and vindicate from the founer errouris, quhairwith they war befoir corruptit : and augmentit with ſindry warkis, quhilk was not befoir imprentit.
The Contents of the Buik, and quhat warkis ar augmentit, the nixt Ane. ſall ſchaw.
Vnus etiam poſt funera virtus.
IOB. VII.
Militia eſt vita hominis ſuper terram.
Imprentit at Edinburgh, be Henrie Charteris.
Anno, M. D. LXXXXII.
Cum Priuilegio Regali.

Title-page of Lindsay's "Works," 1592

The most important of Lyndsay's other works is his *Testament and Complaint of Our Sovereign Lord's Papingo* (parrot) a bold denunciation of the evils of the time. He was continually inditing short satires against what he considered abuses, and exhorting his well-intentioned but weak master to greater firmness in policy and consistency in life. Beginning as a denouncer of ecclesiastical abuses, he gradually became a thorough partisan of the Reformation ; but neither this nor the freedom of his censures seems to have exposed him to peril or odium. He was frequently employed in diplomatic missions, but had retired from public affairs some time before his death in 1555.

Scotch prose at this period is not important. Major and Hector Boece wrote their histories of Scotland in Latin. Bellenden translated Boece into Latin, though with additions and variations. *The Complaint of Scotland* (1549) is a good specimen of prose, but all the plan and much of the substance are taken from the *Quadrilogue Invectif* of Alain Chartier in the fifteenth century.

The reigns of Edward VI. and Mary produced little that was new in literature, although several excellent works of older date were then published for

[1] Nimbly. [2] Disguised. [3] Taster.

the first time. The indefatigable and pugnacious Bishop JOHN BALE (1495 ?-1562) may be placed under them : but the most valuable of his writings, his historical and antiquarian labours, were composed in Latin ; his polemics scarcely concern us ; and his curious dramas must be reserved for notice in another place. So must the plays of JOHN HEYWOOD the epigrammatist (1497?-1580?), mostly written under Henry VIII., but his epigrams, though until lately referred to the year 1562, may be placed under Mary, the recent discovery of an edition of the fourth century, dated 1560, showing that an undated edition of the first three centuries, previously known to exist, must be earlier still. Heywood occupied a somewhat ambiguous position at court between retainer and jester, and was a favourite with Mary, whose religious opinions he shared. After her death he went into exile and died abroad. His epigrams are not remarkable for brilliancy, but are interesting as the first English attempts at this style of composition.

John Heywood

Woodcut portrait from "The Spider and the Flie"

The disastrous reign of Mary, nevertheless, is believed to have witnessed the composition of one of the most perfect of English classics, though this was not published till long after. It was in 1557 that GEORGE CAVENDISH (1500?–1561 ?), formerly gentleman usher to Cardinal Wolsey, wrote his life of his master, a book worthy of the subject in dignity and of the author in charm. In faithfully depicting Wolsey's greatness of character, and not less the arrogance and despotism that impaired it, Cavendish has at the same time unintentionally depicted himself as the faithful follower with whom loyalty is an instinct, and whom neither his lord's misfortunes nor his own perception of his failings, can ever detach from him. Some tedious particulars got over, the narrative flows on like a clear and limpid stream, conducting the great Minister from the giddy height of power

and favour where he is found at first to the ultimate abyss of ruin which has always yawned for him, but has never seemed entirely inevitable, owing to the chronicler's fidelity in recording the gleams of hope which from time to time supported Wolsey's spirit, but which only deepen the tragedy to us to whom its issue is already known. Few narratives convey to the reader so strong an impression of actual presence at the scenes described, and of actual participation in the feelings which they must have called forth. The charm resides in the writer's transparency of soul, and the veracity with which he records the impressions he received from what passed before his eyes. His description of Henry VIII.'s entertainment to the French ambassador, for example, conveys the spirit of the festivity better than the most laboured description, and yet resembles the innocent prattle of a child :—

King James V.

From "Inscriptiones Historicæ Regum Scotorum, 1602

In the midst of this banquet there was tourneying at the barriers, even, in the chamber, with lusty gentlemen in gorgeous complete harness, on foot; then there was the like on horseback; and after all this there was the most goodliest disguising or interlude, made in Latin and French, whose apparel was of such exceeding riches that it passeth my capacity to expound. This done, there came in such a number of fair ladies and gentlewomen that bare any bruit or fame of beauty in all this realm, in the most richest apparel, and devised in divers goodly fashions that all the cunningest tailors could devise to shape or cut, to set forth their beauty, gesture, and goodly proportion of their bodies: who seemed to all men more angelic than earthly, made of flesh and bone. Surely to me, simple soul, it seemed inestimable to be described, and so I think it was to others of a more higher judgment—with whom these gentlemen of France danced until another mask came in of noble gentlemen, who danced and masked with these fair ladies and gentlewomen, every man as his fantasy served him. This done, and the maskers departed, there came in another mask of ladies so gorgeously apparelled in costly garments that I dare not presume to take upon me to make thereof any declaration, lest I should rather deface than beautify them, therefore I leave it untouched. These lady maskers took each of them a French gentleman to dance and mask with them. Ye shall

Queen Mary I.

After the portrait by Joannes Corvus

understand that these lady maskers spoke good French, which delighted much these gentlemen, to hear these ladies speak to them in their own tongue. Thus was their night occupied and consumed from five of the clock until two or three after midnight; at which time it was convenient to all estates to draw to their rest. And thus every man departed whitherto they had most relief. Then, as nothing, either health, wealth, or pleasure, can always endure, so ended this triumphant banquet, the which in the morning seemed to all the beholders but as a fantastical dream.

Cardinal Wolsey
After the portrait in the National Portrait Gallery

Cavendish's biography was not printed until 1641, and then in a very imperfect shape, but had been widely circulated in manuscript. It is largely used in Churchyard's *Tragedy of Cardinal Wolsey* (1587), and to a less extent in *Henry VIII.*, but not in the part of the play attributable to Shakespeare. His collaborator Fletcher was likely to be acquainted with the work, being a son of the Bishop of London, who had bequeathed him half his library. It was eventually restored to its original form by S. W. Singer, who had the good fortune to find and identify the autograph manuscript of the author.

Cavendish was a Roman Catholic, and devoted to the old order of things in State and Church. There was fitness in a book like his, consecrated to the memory of fallen greatness, ranking as the one literary monument of the reign of Mary, and being composed on the verge of a period of English history whose glory, both political and literary, was to cast every preceding era into the shade.

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